

Between Ground Zero and square one: how George W. Bush failed on Russia

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Hans-Joachim Spanger

Between Ground Zero and Square One

How George W. Bush failed on Russia

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Summary

Towards the end of George W. Bush's administration, relations between Washington and Moscow are back to the point where they started, the Cold War. Public debate has clear ideas about where to attribute the blame: to Putinism with its emphasis on an authoritarian and interventionist state and the overweening self-confidence of the energy bully, on the one hand, and to Bushism with its militarized endeavours to mould a world in its own democratic image, on the other. However both these represent an inadequate simplification of the actual complexity, which does not sufficiently take into account the vacillations of the Bush administration, swinging between the realism of Bush's father and the liberal internationalism of his predecessor turned neo-conservative, or the interaction between Washington and Moscow.

This swing towards emphasizing democratic values may well make the increasing estrangement appear more plausible. But in actual fact Bush's policy towards Moscow, just as Clinton's before him, consisted of a contradictory and changeable amalgam of values and interests. The most obvious constant feature in the Bush administration, in contrast to Clinton's, is the malign neglect of Russia. It initially appeared to be unnecessary to pay Russia an excessive amount of attention, due to the persistent weaknesses it had from the 1990s, whereas in the wake of its growing weight its democratic shortcomings were put forward as justification. This is the real reason why there has never been any coherent strategic orientation in Bush's Russia policy, beyond the presidential friendship which Bush initiated early on and to which he still holds fast even now. However, this indifference had fatal consequences in its effect on Moscow.

Bush's look into Putin's eyes in June 2001 in Ljubljana was the starting point with which the confrontational turning away from Clinton's "happy talk", equally feared by Moscow and Washington alike, was avoided. 11 September 2001 considerably reinforced this rapprochement, after all Russia had promptly chosen the right side in Bush's war against terrorism. However, this did not prevent Bush from keeping his most important election promise in terms of foreign policy by announcing US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in December 2001 even in the face of Putin's declared opposition. In spite of this, both remained united in their "alliance" against terror and in their intention of creating a "new strategic relationship". This apparently also survived the Iraq conflict, which despite all the tensions officially never called Bush's "trusting relationship" with Putin into question. Nonetheless this was the beginning of a still ongoing erosion of trust whereby, in the course of the reinforced democratic standards in Washington, collision with political reality in Russia was increasingly gaining ground.

Originally focused on the Middle East, the 9/11 programme of democratic transformation intensified into a global freedom agenda, which Bush elevated to a guiding principle for his second term in office in his inaugural speech of January 2005. The consequences for Russia were ambivalent: public criticism of the direction of Putin's domestic policy combined itself with reticence over making relations conditional on democracy and the refusal to expel Russia from the G8. Washington's criticism of Bush in the run-up to the St Petersburg G8 summit of 2006 was directed at this demand: Bush's freedom agenda

had created a tool for opposition in Congress and beyond, with which they could challenge his Russia policy. This was complemented by the fact that in practice business as usual was being carried on, in the inevitable effort to find a balance between transformational confrontation and foreign policy cooperation and in view of the fact that in the corridors of the administration's decision-making processes a lot of strategic steam was escaping from Bush's revolutionary vision.

What remained of the debates in the run-up to the G8 summit was, besides a policy review without any recognisable gain, a legendary speech given by Vice-President Cheney on 4 May 2006 in Vilnius. It marked a turning point in US-Russian relations in that it was followed by a Cold War of words which continually flared up over the ensuing months and to which no end is in sight even after Putin's speech at the Munich Security Policy Conference in February 2007. By no means is it merely a question of dissent over perceptions of political systems: "universal" versus "sovereign" democracy. Instead, in a geo-strategic line of argument it also concerns criticism of American unilateralism, which has found in the view of Moscow a particularly aggressive and menacing variation in the form of regime change. The current dilemma is consequently that relations are not only collapsing because of diverging values to be patched up by residual common interests, but that increasingly large holes are appearing in the core area of mutual foreign and security policy interests.

This affects the sanctions imposed on Iran, where both sides are at least in agreement over the basic objectives. It also affects the status of Kosovo, where the objectives are diametrically opposed. Furthermore it affects core issues concerning arms control, over which cooperation has been stalling for some time now, ranging from the CFE Treaty to strategic arms control to missile defence, where Russia reacted to American stationing plans with a dual strategy of threatening gestures and negotiation proposals.

The Cold War of words has left deep traces in relations between Washington and Moscow, whose mutual mistrust results in their being further distanced from one another than they have ever been since the end of the Soviet Union. This mistrust is stirred up by fundamental differences in perception, at the centre of which are Russian rejection of the democratic path of American virtue, on the one hand, and American incapacity to come to terms with Russia's rediscovered sense of self-confidence, on the other. According to the interpretation of democratic peace promulgated in Washington, there is a narrow nexus between Putin's authoritarian course at home and his increasingly confrontational policy abroad. For Moscow, on the other hand, this taking of sides against Putinism merely serves to underline the fact that contrary to official rhetoric there is no interest in having a strong Russian partner but only in having a weak vassal. Both have their roots in the fundamentally divergent perception of the 1990s, in Putin's view a decade of secular decline, and in Bush's the dawn of a new era.

These differences in mutual perception are so fundamental, that there is no question of simply making cosmetic adjustments. Instead, the coordinates of US Russia policy need to be redefined from scratch. There is a need for a coherent dual strategy, in which the two equally legitimate objectives are to be jointly pursued: to influence conditions in Russia in a democratic way and to use relations with Russia for the joint resolution of international

issues. This requires in the interest of promoting democracy a de-ideologizing of democratic peace in the US administration's official discourse and its uncoupling from American geostrategy and its military tools in the form of regime change. In the interest of international cooperation there should be a willingness to acknowledge dissent and recognise that global partnerships and procedures which are established under international law are essential even for the "indispensable nation". Both require something akin to a cultural transformation in the USA and are not exactly made any easier by the fact that a reversal in the worrying trend is no longer dependent on the USA alone but also on Russia. Yet the latter's demands for status are much more prominent than its problem-solving capacities, but only through a policy of engaging Russia will it be possible to tell what Moscow actually has to contribute to the resolution of current international conflicts.

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*“Give us Gazprom and we will say that you are
a democratic country”¹*

The Bush administration has – distributed carefully between its two terms in office – managed to complete a dual work of art in the form of its Russian policy. At the time of taking office, it was confronted in its own estimation with the worst relations with Russia since the end of the Soviet Union. During George W. Bush’s first term in office, and in the shadow of *Ground Zero*, these relations reached their highest point in the history of the two countries², only to end up towards the end of his second back where Bush had started in 2000 – *Square One*, and in general opinion the worst since the end of the Soviet Union. At the same time, during his administration Bush underwent a radical turnaround in conceptional terms. The beginning of his term of office was governed by the classic realist premises of his father, which perceived Russia primarily in terms of the international balance of power. In contrast, during the second, it was the principles of Bill Clinton’s liberal internationalism, in a neo-conservative reading under which the “spread of freedom” was elevated to be a key element of a transformation in the international balance of power.

This turnaround *prima facie* makes the increasing estrangement appear plausible which has characterized US-Russian relations for the last few years and most recently threatened a renewal of the Cold War. The encounter between Bush’s freedom postulate proclaimed in 2005 and the increasingly pronounced authoritarian etatism in the form of Putinism inevitably had to unleash a centrifugal momentum. The US National Security Strategy clarifies this connection in its two versions of 2002 and 2006. The first version of 2002 located Russia with relief on the “same side” in the shadow of 9/11, united by the common terrorist threat, and from this drew the far-reaching conclusion that “the United States will build on these common interests to promote global security. We are also increasingly united by common values. Russia is in the midst of a hopeful transition, reaching for its democratic future and a partner in the war on terror” – this disregarding the fact that, elsewhere in the document, there had already been a complaint about “uneven commitment to the basic values of free-market democracy”. There was therefore no doubt about the objective of a “strategic partnership”, which would be limited in its scope only by Russia’s continuing “weakness” (The National Security Strategy 2002: 26f). In the currently valid version of 2006 in contrast the partnership was rhetorically downgraded: “The United States seek to work closely with Russia on strategic issues of common interest and

- 1 An ironic comment by Sergei Markov in a discussion with Michael McFaul at the Washington Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, How Democratic Is Today’s Russia? (Discussion Meeting, Washington D. C., 12.5.2006: 24), in: www.ceip.org (7.11.2006).
- 2 According to the then US Ambassador in Moscow, Alexander Vershbow, who in February 2002 came to the realization that, “the United States and Russia are closer today – politically, economically, and militarily – than at any time in our history” – a claim for which Gerhard Schröder needed a few more years. Goldgeier/McFaul (2002: 318).

to manage issues on which we have differing interests” – and its consolidation made subject to domestic political conditions:

“We must encourage Russia to respect the values of freedom and democracy at home and not to impede the cause of freedom and democracy in these regions. Strengthening our relationship will depend on the policies, foreign and domestic, that Russia adopts. Recent trends regrettably point toward a diminishing commitment to democratic freedoms and institutions. We will work to try to persuade the Russian Government to move forward, not backward, along freedom’s path” (The National Security Strategy 2006: 39).

It would therefore appear as if in American policy on Russia the realist-motivated converging of interests of the early Bush Jr. have been ousted by the idealist-motivated divergence in values of the later. However, it is not that simple. Rhetorical and operational politics do not in any way coincide as most commonly in American foreign policy. Instead, in Bush’s policy towards Moscow, as with Clinton before him, we are dealing with a contradictory and changeable amalgam of values and interests. While this very fact reflects a certain continuity in American policy on Russia, in the case of Bush two no less contradictory constants have been introduced, operationally speaking. On the one hand, there is the unwavering effort by the American president since 2001 to cultivate as close a relation as possible with the holder of office in the Kremlin despite any vicissitudes – also in this case following a much maligned pattern, as characterized in the Clinton administration. On the other hand, there is the malign neglect of Russia in the process of unilaterally looking after what is perceived in Washington to be the national interest.

Doubtless the demonstratively friendly relations between the presidents in the face of the dominant separating off of Russia in the American Congress, the media and the political class – “Washington’s ever-growing ‘anti-Russian fatwa’”, as Stephen Cohen sarcastically described it – are an important corrective to the “bipartisan American Cold War against post-Communist Russia” (Cohen 2006). In any event this was capable of merely containing the collateral damage from the unilateralism also nonchalantly exercised against Russia, and the accompanying indifference towards its needs, but not of neutralizing them. The Bush administration was aware of Russia not only, as Thomas E. Graham made clear, through the prism of other problems (Graham 2001); it also did not want to pay Moscow and its interests an excessive amount of cooperative attention – initially because of the weaknesses with which Russia had emerged from the 1990s, and later along with its increasing weight because of its democratic shortcomings. This is the reason why Russian influence on American policy was and is extremely low and why there was no coherent strategic orientation in either the early realist or the later idealist variations, with the result that Bush was simulating a policy on Russia rather than actually practising one. In principle, Russia could have been subject of a coherent strategy, as called for by Bush’s critics, as the object of an internal transformation or external containment as well as a partner in a purely selective cooperation or a comprehensive integration. The Bush administration’s policy on Russia had and has a little of everything in what it has to offer. The effect was correspondingly mixed.

In Russian perceptions, this indifferent behaviour by the Americans rapidly consolidated itself into a malign neglect, even if this did not correspond to the intentions of the Bush administration. In contrast to Washington, the USA and the West continue to rep-

resent the decisive reference for Moscow. This therefore has remained closely attached until now to a reactive pattern, albeit in differently articulated forms. In this way, the realist programme of the early Bush neatly corresponded to the foreign policy mindset of the Moscow leadership, making it easier for them swiftly to choose the “right” side on 11 September 2001 and thereby create the preconditions for a renewed intensification of relations. However, while Putin was anticipating a genuine cooperation, Bush understood this as fealty – in the Manichaeian logic culminating in unilateralism of a “nation at war”, which sought to recognise Russia and any other coalition partners in the global war against terrorism in one of only two roles: as a satellite or an opponent. Only against a backdrop of this frustrating experience with the American “grand strategy of primacy”³, did the aggressively delivered freedom postulate win its irritating dimension: it began to have an effect as a threat by a highly superior power, driven like the Soviet Union by “ideological interests”, as postulated by the leading ideologist of neo-conservatism, Irving Kristol (Kristol 2003). And it mobilized with the reminder of the Western paternalism of the 1990s precisely those humiliating experiences which Putin sought to overcome in both his domestic policy of restoration and his foreign policy.

Conscious of its growing weight, Moscow has reacted in an increasingly indignant way to this since 2006. Not only were the democratic preconditions for relations in the new National Security Strategy resoundingly rejected by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but Moscow also adopted a geostrategically motivated line of argument, which has since characterized Russian reactions to US policy in general and its policy of democratization in particular – most obviously in Putin’s speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007:

“No one has or can have any exclusive right to interpret what democracy means. Attempts at an artificial or even forced propagation of democracy in other countries not only cannot succeed, but might even discredit the main idea. Popular slogans are simply being used to pursue (the U.S.’s) own ends. This is seen more and more in practical issues of world politics and intergovernmental relations, when proposed solutions are based not on an objective analysis of the situation, nor on the common principles of international law, but on their own understanding of so-called political expediency.”⁴

Since then it has been less a question of collapsing relations because of diverging values, than of the appearance of growing holes in the core area of mutual foreign and security policy interests. This now touches on basic issues to do with the way American foreign policy sees itself and can no longer be settled via changes in the emphasis put on global democracy promotion.

Public debate on the newly erupted Cold War clearly identifies guilty parties: Putinism and the overweening self-esteem of the energy bully or alternatively Bushism and its militarized endeavours to mould the world in its own democratic image. Both these attributions represent an inadequate simplification of the actual complexity, however, which neither the vacillations of the Bush administration nor the interaction between Washington and Moscow adequately take into consideration. Both should be, but have not previously

3 Mastanduno (1997: 51).

4 Downloaded from: www.sras.org (16.7.2007).

been, subjected to a detailed study. This begins with Bush's determined dissociation from the democratization agenda of his predecessor, which was followed by a cautious rapprochement with Russia and finally in the shadow of 9/11 an *entente cordiale* against terrorism, but also Bush's own neo-conservative democratization agenda with its highly ambivalent effects. The stylization of the regime issue into a building block of international relations could not fail to bathe Putinism in a far harsher light, and at the same time open the gateway for political pressure at home, from protagonists who took Bush's freedom agenda to the letter. From the Russian point of view, the new US programme – temporarily lent wings by the series of “coloured” revolutions – reflected interventionist intentions, which in practice were much less evident but, nonetheless provoked completely unforeseen reactions. As a result Russia is now further distanced from the USA not only in terms of its domestic policy but also of its foreign policy, than at the beginning of Bush's term in office. Measured by this, Bush has completely failed in his policy on Russia. And although the US administration cannot be charged with developments within Russia, the limitations – and the alternatives – of a policy can be illustrated, which in the absence of clear objectives and strategic coherence, gambled away the chances of cooperation, ignored the risks and therefore degenerated into malign neglect.

1. The president must be a clear-eyed realist: Bush vs. Clinton

Even if presentation of gushing election rhetoric can be allowed as a prominent characteristic of the American political system, a road as long as George W. Bush has trodden between diametrically opposed classic realist and idealist positions has been taken by virtually none of his predecessors. His presidency began against a backdrop of realist premises: the young Bush clearly sought to continue from where the old one had left off. This happened not least because of the influence of the leader of his team of foreign policy advisors, Condoleezza Rice, who had already been employed in the days of Bush Sr. on the National Security Council – under one of the most prominent representatives of US realism, Brent Scowcroft, and as both expert on the Soviet Union. For the new administration's policy on Russia she was appointed to a key position, at best equivalent to that of Strobe Talbott in the Clinton administration.

Up to 11 September 2001, however, foreign policy did not come under those areas of policy in which candidate and president endeavoured to plough a particularly deep furrow. Bush therefore limited himself in his election campaign to a speech on general principles, which he presented under the programmatic title: “A distinctly American internationalism”. Quintessentially the message was as follows: “In the defense of our nation, a president must be a clear-eyed realist.” Admittedly he sought to put this realism “to the service of the American ideal”, including democratic peace and universal democratic principles. In reinforcing realism, a natural consequence for American foreign policy would however be that: “It must have a great and guiding goal: to turn this time of American influence into generations of democratic peace. This is accomplished by concentrating on enduring national interests” (Bush 1999).

His pronouncements on China and Russia, whose future as “powers in transition” was uncertain, remained as vague as his strategic orientation. However, while he deemed China a “competitor” and not a “strategic partner”, he sought all the same to forge a “new strategic relationship” with Russia, which would focus on three things: nuclear disarmament, missile defence, and the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. He nonetheless bound up the uncertainties of the future in both cases with an optimistic note, in the case of China with trust in the transforming effect of free trade, and in the case of Russia with the petition, not to be too badly deterred by the unsatisfactory success of the transformation, for: “patience is needed – patience, consistency, and a principled reliance on democratic forces” (Bush 1999).

The anticipated operational consequences of this pre-presidential basic plan were set out by Condoleezza Rice in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, in which under the programmatic heading “Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest” she presented the alternative plan to the foreign policy of the Clinton administration (Rice 2000). She called for focus to be directed at the “key priorities” of national interest, among which she counted besides developing military strength (including missile defence) consolidating relations with the allies and fuller relations with the two big powers China and Russia, for: “The reality is that a few big powers can radically affect international peace, stability, and prosperity. These states are capable of disruption on a grand scale, and their fits of anger or acts of beneficence affect hundreds of millions of people.” Measured by this challenge the creation of a “prosperous and democratic world” in the course of internal transformations appeared to her to be a “second-order effect”, which as after the Second World War would present itself in the rigorous pursuit of American interests:

“Some worry that this view of the world ignores the role of values, particularly human rights and the promotion of democracy. [...] American values are universal. People want to say what they think, worship as they wish, and elect those who govern them; the triumph of these values is most assuredly easier when the international balance of power favors those who believe in them. But sometimes that favorable balance of power takes time to achieve, both internationally and within a society. And in the meantime, it is simply not possible to ignore and isolate other powerful states that do not share those values.”⁵

Neo-conservative ideologists such as Jeffrey Gedmin, whose hour had not yet come, considered such a “highly narrow and limited” definition of the national interest to be unacceptable, as in contrast to Reagan it was not being linked with the “greater international good” of liberal democratic principles, and therefore scarcely contributed to making America’s foreign policy capable of winning followers or acceptance in the world (Gedmin/Schmitt 2001). Since the Iraq War and its sovereign disregard of external and internal balances of power this restriction is meanwhile no longer valid. Nowadays Rice is proclaiming the exact opposite:

“Our experience of this new world leads us to conclude that the fundamental character of regimes matters more today than the international distribution of power. Insisting other-

5 Against this background it is only consistent that democratization – only mentioned in passing as it is – is understood by her entirely in the sense of classic theories of modernization: “The growth of entrepreneurial classes throughout the world is an asset in the promotion of human rights and individual liberty, and it should be understood and used as such” (Rice 2000: 50).

wise is imprudent and impractical. The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. [...] Supporting the growth of democratic institutions in all nations is not some moralistic flight of fancy; it is the only realistic response to our present challenges" (Rice 2005).

The fact that with this the "liberal interventionists" of the Clinton administration and the infamous "neo-conservatives" of the Bush administration are banging on the same drum, "calling for the United States to become the vanguard of a worldwide democratic revolution to liberate the masses and make America safe" (Simes 2007), has been met in its own political camp by determined opposition from classic realists, who are grouping mainly around the Nixon Center. For this reason its president, Dimitri Simes, had during the election campaign expressly welcomed Bush's rhetorical rejection of Gore's "promoting the values of democracy and human rights and freedom all around the world", for the USA was much more in a position to look after its own interests "than to make a decision about what is most appropriate for people in those far distant places, about which most Americans know very little and in which they have little interest". The result was a purely "arbitrary policy with no moral foundation", serving neither American interests nor values (Simes 2000).

The drawing up of priorities in the realist tradition was considered by Rice at the time to be applicable also to relations with Russia, where US policy had to concentrate on "significant security issues" and not as under Clinton on internal transformation. In the routine crisis of August 1998 this in any case failed, and with it the US reform strategy. It was anyhow an illusion of liberal internationalism to expect a pro-Western foreign policy from a democratically transformed Russia, for "Russia is a great power, and we will always have interests which are as likely to conflict as to coincide."⁶

While in the case of China its growing strength was a cause for unease, in Russia's case the opposite was true with its "weakness and fickleness" posing the principal threat to America's security (Rice 2000: 59). Thomas E. Graham, whom Rice entrusted with the Russia portfolio on the National Security Council in 2002, further embellished this diagnosis. He detected not only a country in "secular decline" but also considered it appropriate to envisage "a world without Russia" for: "we are witnessing a geo-political and geo-economic shift of historic dimensions, one in which Russia will become less and less an actor in world affairs, while running the risk of becoming an object of competition among more advanced and dynamic powers" (Graham 1999).

6 Rice (2000: 59). For Thomas E. Graham it was therefore also clear that the USA could no longer interfere "intimately" in Russia's internal affairs: "But the Bush administration will be less concerned about the details of Russia's domestic political arrangements, including executive-legislative relations, federal structures, and the party system, than the Clinton administration was." He considered the same to be true of economic policy: "The assumption will be that the Russian government knows what needs to be done to rebuild Russia and that it must show the political will to take the tough, unpopular measures necessary to turning the country around. Moreover, for the Bush administration, investors, both foreign and domestic, will be the best judges of whether Russia has gotten its economic policies right" (Graham 2001: 8, 10). If this were so, there would be no problems now – in 2006 for instance US investments rose by 50%; cf. Kramer 2007.

In reality there could be no doubt about Russia's deep crisis and its dwindling international status, however this was not true of the political consequences which might be borne by the West. Gerhard Schröder, like Bill Clinton, saw it as his duty to pursue a policy of "do no harm", which would contribute first of all to stability and secondly to the domestic application of liberal principles, and equally backed the closest relations to the Russian leadership. George W. Bush did not share this view. Instead, according to Simes, in the spirit of the "collective blindness about America's role in the world" equated the diagnosis of Russian weakness with self-confidence in American strength, the "triumphalist tendency and sense of unlimited potential" in such a way that Moscow barely entered any longer into Washington's calculations (Simes 1999). However, even the American unilateralism which fed on this allowed itself to be exercised in different ways, as Bush documented early on in the first few months of his term in office.

2. I was able to get a sense of his soul: Bush's return to Clinton

In relevant Washington circles at the beginning of the new millennium there was lively discussion over "Who lost Russia?", although the new administration did not find this loss particularly disquieting. Quite the contrary. Bush's father had still perceived the world through the prism of the Cold War, with the result that the preservation of domestic and foreign stability in the cooperative transformation of the Soviet Union appeared to him to be the key to a new world order.⁷ For Clinton, Yeltsin's struggle against the powers of post-Soviet darkness in the new Russia continued to command attention, whereas both had been dropped by Bush: he neither saw American "preeminence" as being limited by the link with the former adversary, nor did he believe in having to cooperate with its leadership so as to fulfil a democratic mission. The Bush administration instead perceived Russia through the prism of other problems (Graham 2001), and these suggested a "tough realism".⁸ With this Bush sought to confront the Russian proliferation in particular towards Iran, which had already attracted complaints during the election campaign, and first and foremost implement his vigorous plans for building a strategic missile defence, one of the few foreign policy trademarks of the new administration.

The start was as expected: barely in office, the administration ordered the expulsion of 50 Russian diplomats accused of espionage, while the State Department tested Russia's open flank and arranged a meeting of ranking diplomats with the Chechen Foreign Minister in exile Ilyas Akhmadov, and other representatives of the administration such as security advisor Condoleezza Rice and director of the CIA, George Tenet, lamented the nu-

7 For this reason this transformation should also not be forced, as George H. W. Bush propounded not least in his notorious "Chicken Kiev" speech, in which in August 1991 he warned the Ukrainians against "suicidal nationalism" and against the mistaken belief that freedom and independence are identical per se. The term was coined in a commentary by William Safire, who referred to this speech by Bush as his "most memorable foreign-policy blunder", cf. also Safire 2004. The speech to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine on 1 August 1991 can be downloaded from: <http://en.wikisource.org> (14.6.2007).

8 Bush cited in Goldgeier/McFaul (2003: 306). Cf. also (2002: 316).

clear “threat” posed by Russia (U.S.-Russian Relations 2001: 1). This ostentatious turning away from Clinton’s “happy talk” with the Russian leadership lasted only a few months however. The confrontational turn feared in Moscow and Washington alike remained an episode. As early as May 2001, Bush reaffirmed in one of his rare comments on Russia: “Today’s Russia is not our enemy, but a country in transition with an opportunity to emerge as a great nation, democratic, at peace with itself and its neighbours”.⁹ This was an explicit and in view of past history hardly coincidental adoption of Talbott’s formulations, which in his circle were initially taken to be a prime example of Clinton’s misdirected transformational policy.¹⁰

Yet no new strategic concept on Russia arose from this. Instead Russia remained a *quantité négligeable*, a fact unchanged by a further, once much maligned gesture borrowed from Clinton: Bush’s demonstrative bear hug of Putin at their first, long delayed meeting on 16 June 2001 in Ljubljana, with which the style, if not the content, of US-Russian policy altered. It ended with the legendary claim by Bush, who when questioned about the trust he felt able to put in Putin replied:

“I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy. We had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul; a man deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country.”

At the time he also acknowledged that he shared “many values” with Putin, namely the love of his own country and of his family, which appeared to Bush to be far greater than purely a security relationship or a supposed small detail such as the ABM Treaty, in which no agreement could be achieved.¹¹ Chechnya or the restrictions on press freedom already discernable in Russia were topics not explicitly mentioned at the time, beyond the unanimous declarations that they were jointly striving for “human rights, tolerance, religious freedom, freedom of speech and independent media should be protected and pushed forward”.¹²

Certainly this remark – like Schröder’s “democrat through and through” (*lupenreiner Demokrat*) – weighed as an increasingly heavy millstone round Bush’s neck, and pursued him throughout both terms in office with increasing difficulties of justification. He therefore elucidated further on his comment for instance at the no less prominent press conference with Putin in Bratislava in February 2005, saying that Putin had justified a trusting relationship, for “he means what he says, and ‘Yes’ means yes, and ‘No’ means no”.¹³

9 Remarks by the President to Students and Faculty at National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, 1.5.2001, in: www.whitehouse.gov (5.5.2006).

10 Talbott spoke of a „normal, modern state – democratic in its governance, abiding by its own constitution and by its own laws, market-oriented and prosperous in its economic development, at peace with itself and with the rest of the world“. Cit. in Graham (2001: 7).

11 Press Conference by President Bush and Russian Federation President Putin, Brdo Pri Kranju, Slovenia, in: www.whitehouse.gov (5.5.2006).

12 “A New Relationship Between the United States and Russia.” Joint Statement Presidents Bush and Putin, Washington D.C., 13.11.2001, in: www.state.gov (24.6.2007).

13 Statements and Answers to Journalist’s Questions after the Talks with U.S. President George Bush, 24.2.2005, in: www.kremlin.ru (25.2.2005).

In view of Putin's still enthusiastic adherence to universal democratic principles, this was a remarkable claim by Bush, from which he has nonetheless not distanced himself to date, irrespective of concrete evidence to the contrary.¹⁴

11 September 2001 noticeably deepened the harmony at top level as, in the "black and white world" of the war against terrorism proclaimed by Bush, Russia had not hesitated to choose the right side. Putin not only offered the USA the cooperation of the intelligence services as well as logistic support in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, he also tolerated the setting up of American military bases in Uzbekistan and Kirghizia in the face of strong criticism from his own security establishment. The Russian leadership saw in these measures a one-off chance to become the subject again in American world policy, rather than the object – not in confrontation, but in cooperation with the all-powerful opponent. Moscow for its part had certainly reacted with irritation to the confrontational undertones of the new Washington administration, but Putin's foreign policy did not depart grumbling, as under Yeltsin, but instead opted for a pragmatic management of its own shortcomings. On this basis, Bush and Putin were able to demonstrate in Ljubljana in 2001, that they did not live, as Thomas Graham had assumed, in "completely different worlds" due to power asymmetry (Graham 1999). In any event, they pursued very different objectives, although atmospherically not much of this could be detected at the time.

The high point of the rapprochement was undoubtedly Putin's visit to Bush's Texan ranch in Crawford in November 2001 – as a seal on the "friendship" between the two presidents as well as reference to the fact that Putin was the first foreign statesman who called Bush on 11 September. The welcome speech was more akin to a eulogy:

"And it's my honor to welcome to Central Texas a new style of leader, a reformer, a man who loves his country as much as I love mine; a man who loves his wife as much as I love mine; a man who loves his daughters as much as I love my daughters; and a man who is going to make a huge difference in making the world more peaceful, by working closely with the United States."¹⁵

Despite this, Bush announced withdrawal from the ABM Treaty on 13 December 2001. The operational goal to lay aside the ABM Treaty jointly with Russia within the "new bilateral strategic framework"¹⁶ could not be achieved, in spite of the "happy talk" reminiscent of Clinton between Bush and Putin in Texas. The treaty, for Bush an obsolete relic of the Cold War and expression of a prehistoric way of thinking, remained for Putin a "cornerstone of the modern architecture of international security", in the conviction fostered since the bombardment of Yugoslavia that only nuclear deterrence would set a limit to the military escapades of the USA. Nonetheless, the withdrawal remained without any serious

14 For example at the joint press conference in Kennebunkport on 2 July 2007, where he emphasized in reply to the same question about Putin's soul and freedom in Russia, that Putin had always told him the truth and: "Yes, I trust him." President Bush Meets with President Putin of Russian Federation, in: www.whitehouse.gov (5.7.2007).

15 President Bush and President Putin Talk to Crawford Students, 15.11.2001, in: www.whitehouse.gov (16.7.2007).

16 As in "Joint Statement on New U.S.-Russian Relationship", 14.11.2001, in: www.whitehouse.gov (16.7.2007).

consequences as Putin clearly had no desire to put the newly re-established relations at risk, as he explained in Crawford: “And given the nature of the relationship between the United States and Russia, one can rest assured that whatever final solution is found, it will not threaten or put to threat the interests of both our countries and of the world.”¹⁷ For Bush meanwhile this experience reinforced the idea that it was not necessary to take Russia into consideration. It is therefore no wonder that US concessions, such as the declared willingness to work together on missile defence or the agreed establishment of a shared early warning data exchange centre and the setting up of an advisory group on strategic security under the direction of the foreign and defence ministers remained a decorative episode without any practical outcome.

In the spirit of their proclaimed interests both parties emphasized in May 2002 in their comprehensive Moscow Declaration, that they were in the process of building a “new strategic relationship” and seeking to resolve differences “in the spirit of mutual respect”.¹⁸ The form that this took is documented in the Moscow Treaty, or SORT (Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty), signed on the same occasion. This replaced de facto the START-II Treaty and largely followed the American script: contrary to Russian proposals and entirely in line with what Bush had already announced in his election campaign, the Moscow Treaty was little more than an assurance of unilaterally planned reductions decanted into the form of a treaty. The situation was hardly any different when it came to the expansion of NATO, already announced by Bush in Warsaw in the summer of 2001. It is true that with the creation of the NATO-Russia Council in May 2002 a valuable consultation organ for the inclusion of Russia was set in motion. However by approving NATO expansion in May 2003 the alliance believed they could nonchalantly step over the “red line” once drawn around the Baltic states by Yeltsin.

According to prevailing opinion in Moscow the balance of support for the USA was largely negative, which did not yet make Putin dissociate himself from Bush, however. This only happened in the wake of the Iraq war and along the so-called Paris-Berlin-Moscow “axis”, from then on arousing doubts in Washington over Russian reliability in the “Global War on Terrorism”. This brought about a cooling off, but not a crisis. From Moscow’s point of view, the division of the West by Washington into “willing” and “unwilling” coalition partners lent its understanding of multipolarism new plausibility and also fed illusions that Moscow somehow were part of the equation. The dissociation from the USA remained moderate, therefore, although Putin’s complaints about the infringement of the “inalienable principle of state sovereignty” by applying the “rule of the fist” sound familiar in light of to-

17 President Bush and President Putin Talk to Crawford Students, 15. 11. 2001, in: www.whitehouse.gov (16.7.2007). This also appeared to security adviser Rice to be Putin’s “most significant declaration” and proof of the “fundamental change in the relationship”: “[W]hat President Putin has been saying is that this is an issue now in the context of a larger relationship that continues to be a source of disagreement between the two sides, but in this larger relationship, it’s not going to have an effect on the relationship as a whole.” (www.whitehouse.gov (16.7.2007)). As a consequence, Russia declared on 14 June 2002 that it did not any longer feel bound to adhere to the START-II Treaty, after the State Duma asserted the right at its delayed ratification of 6 May 2000 to withdraw from START-II, given the USA’s withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.

18 Joint Declaration on the New Strategic Relationship between the Russian Federation and the United States, 24.5.2002, in: www.kremlin.ru (5.7.2007).

day's rhetoric.¹⁹ But even Washington saw not much reason to open up a further front. "Forgive Russia, ignore Germany and punish France" went the dictum attributed to Condoleezza Rice, outlining the different consequences in June 2003.

In actual fact Bush made it clear that the differences over Iraq should not call the "trusting relationship" with Putin into question. Instead both immediately strove to take up from the point at which they had stopped prior to Iraq. Bush did this by inviting the Russian president to a meeting on 27 September 2003 at Camp David, the high point and end point of the undiminished mutual allegiance of the "allies in the war on terror", clothed by Bush in often quoted words:

"Our goal is to bring the U.S.-Russian relationship to a new level of partnership. I respect President Putin's vision for Russia: a country at peace within its borders, with its neighbors, and with the world, a country in which democracy and freedom and rule of law thrive."²⁰

This unreservedly positive evaluation of the political situation in Russia took place already against a backdrop of Bush's strategic turn to the idealistically inspired interventionism, which elevated the global spread of democracy to a "pillar" of peace and security of the free nations.²¹ However on 26 January 2004, only a few months after Camp David, this turn also reached relations with Russia, when the Bush administration's first high-ranking official in the shape of Foreign Minister Colin Powell fired an official warning shot against authoritarian Moscow tendencies. On the occasion of a visit to Moscow he published a commentary in *Izvestia* which referred once again to the "mutual interests and shared values" forming a basis for a partnership, but then went on to criticise the situation in and surrounding Russia:

"Russia's democratic system seems not yet to have found the essential balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. Political power is not yet fully tethered to law. Key aspects of civil society – free media and political party development, for example – have not yet sustained an independent presence. Certain aspects of internal Russian policy in Chechnya, and toward neighbors that emerged from the former Soviet Union, have concerned us, too. We recognize Russia's territorial integrity and its natural interest in lands that abut it. But we recognize no less the sovereign integrity of Russia's neighbors and their rights to peaceful and respectful relations across their borders, as well."²²

19 Cit. from Goldgeier/McFaul (2003: 328).

20 www.whitehouse.gov (23.7.2007). This happened irrespective of the critical comments of other representatives of his administration about the development of democracy in Russia. Thus the ambassador in Moscow, Vershbow, warned on 9.1.2003 – and this in a year after which he had praised US-Russian relations as the best in all history: "We must keep in sight the development of democracy and civil society in Russia", which were the foundation for that "permanent partnership between the USA and Russia" and even represented "some of the greatest challenges". For this reason aid for NGOs and for independent media formed the "key political priorities of the future", in: www.state.gov (23.7.2007).

21 Cf. his strategic speech in London: "President Bush Discusses Iraq Policy at Whitehall Palace in London" on 19.11.2003, in: www.whitehouse.gov (16.7.2007).

22 www.state.gov. In an article which appeared almost simultaneously in *Foreign Affairs* he commented with reference to cooperation in non-proliferation and in the war against terror in a slightly more conciliatory tone: „Perhaps most important, U.S. and Russian political and economic philosophies are converging. Today, Russia is more democratic than not. It is also more of a market economy than not. We should be patient as Russia develops its democratic institutions and as the remnants of Soviet-era corruption is rooted out and the rule of law firmly established.“ (Powell 2004: 30f)

Measured by the choice of words nowadays or in comparison to the rhetorical escapades in the US Congress, where influential voices were already seeking to expel Russia from the G8, this sounds moderate. Nonetheless, Powell's complaint in contrast to the "happy talk" was taken on all sides as a warning. In between time there were the elections to the Russian State Duma in December 2003 – judged by the OSCE observer mission free, but not fair. Also in between time there was the jailing of Mikhail Khodorkovsky on 25 October 2003, which would cause the dismantling of Russia's largest private oil company Yukos. Khodorkovsky was of particular interest to the USA not only for reasons of political expediency, but also because of his investment plans, which targeted primarily the US market. In mid 2003 Khodorkovsky had entered into negotiations with the US companies ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco about a stake in Yukos. Furthermore, Yukos had been planning a pipeline project since 2002 for transporting oil from Western Siberia to Murmansk, to ship it from there to North America, a plan which likewise vanished from the drawing board upon his imprisonment.

It can come as no surprise therefore that reactions in American political and public life were quite strong, especially since Washington and Moscow had only just decided to set up a bilateral energy dialogue in May 2002, underlining growing American interest in an expansion of its limited energy supply from the CIS.²³ In this matter economic – diversification of sources of supply in view of the dangers in the Middle East – and geo-strategic – reinforcement of Russia's neighbours by uncoupling them from the Russian pipeline network – interests were just as profoundly linked as in Moscow's energy policy. One example is the BTC pipeline (Baku-Tiflis-Ceyhan), which, built after lengthy planning with Washington's political backing from May 2003 to May 2005, admittedly represents the most expensive route, but has the charm of removing Azerbaijani oil from the Russian oil transport monopoly. The continuing American complaints about the Russian monopoly of the oil transport network and about the creeping re-nationalization of the Russian energy sector, the attacks on the Production Sharing Agreements of the 1990s such as the Sakhalin II Project or the exclusion of American companies from the exploitation of new deposits such as the Shtokman gas field in the Barents Sea in autumn 2006, complete the American list of grievances.

3. The expansion of freedom in all the world: 9/11 and the neo-conservative consequences

The fact that after 11 September 2001 nothing would remain the same as before applies in particular to the foreign policy of the Bush administration. As "war president" in the global assault on terrorism Bush suddenly found himself with a mission, which his foreign policy had until then largely done without. Soon after the departure from Clinton's liberal internationalism had lost its momentum, the inherent tension came to light which

23 Joint Statement on the New Russian-U.S. Energy Dialogue, Moscow, 24.5.2002, in: www.kremlin.ru (5.7.2007).

existed between Bush's unipolar basic disposition and its realist programme for multipolar power relations within the limits of the international balance of power. Bush's war discourse moved beyond this in favour of an offensive change in the international balance of power by means of regime change and previously unsuccessful nation-building after the American model. The script for this was delivered by those neo-conservatives, for whom the liberal and imperial missions had entered into an unholy alliance.

Originally focused on the Middle East and also exercised there using military means, the new programme consolidated itself into a global freedom agenda. Bush announced it in January 2005 in his second inaugural speech, with which as in the "Global War on Terrorism" he presented every nation with the choice: "The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right." This was justified by the assessment that the "deepest source" of vulnerability of 9/11 was the fact that many regions in the world were sunk in "resentment and tyranny" and that there was only one way out:

"There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom. We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one."²⁴

After his re-election the decision "to plant a flag" for the global spread of democracy had both biographical – besides religious awakening, the impression made on Bush by Nathan Sharansky and his book "The Case for Democracy" – and also current political reasons – the coloured revolutions, which at that time in their orange variety were stimulating the expectation that the cause of democracy could no longer be held back.²⁵ At the same time, however, it also reflected the new composition of powers in the administration: the coalition already looming in 1997 as part of the "Project for the New American Century", between conservative advocates of US hegemony around Vice-President Cheney and Defence Minister Rumsfeld and neo-conservative internationalists, which had come into existence in the preparation of the war against Iraq. This followed new, more structural challenges such as the necessity, in Iraq to move beyond the original liberation exorcism and get involved in the nitty-gritty of the previously scorned nation-building or turn to the new phenomenon of sub-state violence with a global range. Thus 9/11 had revealed a dual new threat, which equally lent plausibility to democratization – that, which as in Afghanistan brought forth the social violence of al-Qaeda from disintegrating states, and that which grew from rebellion against autocratic regimes primarily in the Middle East, since 15 of the 19 attackers came from Saudi Arabia.

Nonetheless, they did not come from Russia. Instead there came a telephone call from Moscow, and Russia was able from now on to argue plausibly that it was itself the victim of terrorist attacks by the international Islamist connection. With this the war in Chech-

24 President Sworn-In to Second Term, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2005).

25 Cf. on this background Baker 2007.

nya disappeared from the political agenda and was incorporated by Bush in the joint war on terrorism – just as the Russian president, whom he greeted in Summer 2002 at the G8 Summit in Canada as a “true supporter” in the fight against terrorism: “He understands the threat of terror, because he has lived through terror. He’s seen terror firsthand and he knows the threat of terrorism. [...] And, therefore, I view President Putin as an ally, a strong ally in the war against terrorism.”²⁶ It had been the lesson from the Cold War, not to look too closely at allies, despite Bush’s newly discovered importance of the nature of regimes.

The gentle light in which Putin’s regime was bathed may also be thanks to the fact that on the side of the neo-conservatives, not least because of their obsession with the Middle East, until very recently there had been no significant interest shown in Russia – with one exception: Bruce P. Jackson. He is not only around in the relevant neo-conservative institutions, but was also active as founder of the “Project on Transitional Democracies” and as member of the “American Committee for Peace in Chechnya”. His comments on Russia leave no room for doubt. In his view the imprisonment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky is an anti-Semitic act of dispossession, comparable only with the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and reminding at the Soviet climate of fear of the 1950s, or the “increasingly aggressive, military and illegal actions” of Russia in the CIS. At the same time, it sealed the failure of the “naive policy on Russia”, since Putin’s visits to Crawford and Camp David were each followed by a “cynical curtailment of democratic liberties in Russia” (Jackson 2003).²⁷ The US policy would have to react to this with “moral” and “strategic” clarity: through public criticism, excluding Russia from the G7, NATO and the White House, and by using East European political capital to develop a transatlantic strategy against the “death” of democracy in Russia and the country’s imperial ambitions (Jackson 2005).

Despite the declarations of alliance in the shadow of 9/11, as Bush’s neo-conservative side-step in Washington brought democracy back into the centre of foreign policy, it was inevitable that the Russian departure from the path of democratic virtue would unleash a centrifugal momentum – under the initial realist conditions this was of no importance whatsoever. Certainly, there had been earlier references, such as for instance in the joint declarations of 2001 and 2002, which professed the “essential values of democracy, human rights, free speech and free media, tolerance, the rule of law, and economic opportunity”.²⁸ In any event this was summit rhetoric, and even in the joint press conferences Putin’s authoritarian activities, which were already being noted in the western public eye,

26 Cit. from Goldgeier/McFaul (2003: 317). Chechnya did not disappear completely, however. Both in the annual human rights report of the State Department and also in several comments at a lower level of the administration the dark side of the Russian war of terror was a topic which continued to attract a critical gaze, cf. e.g. Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Beth Jones, Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington D.C., 18.3.2004 (20515-0128): 6.

27 The same neo-conservative organ presented a completely different story by Lehrman 2003, who put forward good reasons for authoritarian measures and came to the conclusion that Putin in his second term could appear as a “strong leader of a liberal democracy”.

28 Joint Declaration on the New Strategic Relationship between the Russian Federation and the United States, 24.5.2002, in: www.kremlin.ru (5.7.2007).

did not make any difference. With Bush's global freedom agenda, however, an open flank became apparent. Thus in 2005 increasingly vociferous debates broke out in Washington's political circles about the administration's policy on Russia, which jarred against the obvious discrepancy between the idealist ambitions and realist actuality and tried to measure the relative importance of new differences in values in view of continuing concurrence of interests.

Since the democracy issue could no longer be evaded, under growing public pressure, the administration performed the splits, which it attempted to rationalize as a dual strategy in various ways. One element was the fact that, in addition to the professions of cooperation, from now on there was explicit public criticism of the direction of Putin's domestic policy, which in 2005 turned out to be more pronounced than in the case of Colin Powell in the previous year. Thus the "D" word occupied centre-stage for the first time at a meeting between Putin and Bush, organised in February 2005 in Bratislava after the latter's re-election – on a European tour, intended to both usher in a "new age of transatlantic unity" after the convulsions in Iraq, as well as documenting the fact that democracy had to occupy the "centre" of the dialogue with Russia, as Bush announced in a speech in Brussels at the beginning of his European tour.²⁹ In actual fact there were some changes. While in previous years Bush and Putin had been able to make a commitment to democratic principles in their joint public announcements without any trouble, this was now done separately. At the same time, Putin remained defensive in Bratislava, announcing that Russia had made a "final choice" in favour of democracy and that he was not thinking about inventing "any kind of special Russian democracy". He merely asserted that democratic principles would have to fit Russia's current stage of development, its history and its traditions – this entirely in line with official US declarations, which in their turn did not exactly match the similarly propagated universal democratic principles in the sense of "Western-style values".³⁰ For Bush this "absolute declaration in democracy" was Putin's "most important comment", in the private meeting and in public. This did not prevent him however from expressing his "concerns about Russia's determination to implement these universal principles", without wanting to make the "continuing improvement" in relations conditional upon this.³¹

The administration rejected any idea of making current relations conditional on democratic criteria, and also turned against the demands from Congress to isolate Russia and expel it from the G8. In the sense of strategic coherence, however, it saw itself compelled to give a democratic spin to its interests in cooperation. Thus it not only referred to the particular conditions in Russia as by Bush in Bratislava, but also in a further rhetorical

29 President Discusses American and European Alliance in Belgium, Concert Noble, 21.2.2005, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

30 Bush includes in this in particular: „rule of law, freedom of religion, the right of people to assemble, political parties, free press.“ President Discusses Democracy in Iraq with Freedom House, 29.3.2006, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

31 From the joint press conference in Bratislava on 24 February 2005, in: www.state.gov (6.6.2007), as well as Statements and Answers to Journalist's Questions after the Talks with U.S. President George Bush, 24.2.2005, in: www.kremlin.ru (25.2.2005).

figure to the evolutionary prospects and their conditions. In this sense it geared itself towards the “strategic partnership” in the short term and only in the long term towards shared values, for, as new Foreign Minister Condoleezza Rice commented in Moscow in April 2005, “for U.S.-Russian relationships to really deepen, and for Russia to gain its full potential, there needs to be democratic development.”³² However, since under the impression made by the coloured revolutions democratic transformation was also to be supported in the short term, this also had to be integrated into the long-term strategy – through a policy, which for Rice rested on three pillars and could therefore not hide the fact that it was borrowed from the coloured revolution model:

“Rather it is a combination of helping and supporting those in Russia who are trying to support democratic development. It is continued discussion and dialogue with the Russian government about the expectations of the world about Russia in terms of rule of law, support for free press. And it is encouraging Russian integration into those institutions in the international system that, in fact, promote economic liberalization and democratic development.”³³

In 2005 Bush’s freedom agenda was still feeding off the optimism engendered by the coloured revolutions from Belgrade, to Tiflis, Kiev and finally Bishkek, with the result that to some in the administration Moscow appeared to be another domino ready to fall. This also made Bush more reluctant to resist the geostrategic fruits of regime change out of consideration for his ally in the fight against terrorism. There was therefore no doubt for Bush, as before in the case of the Baltics, about welcoming the Ukraine and Georgia after their electoral revolutions into the “freedom camp” and also into the “Euro-Atlantic family”, i.e. into NATO and the EU.³⁴ Heading in the same direction was the signal of garnishing his Moscow trip, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, with detours to the notorious chief enemies of the Kremlin, Latvia and Georgia, where in the spirit of the “global advance of freedom” he likewise expressed his optimism about further coloured revolutions.³⁵ In any event: the practice of promoting democracy looked a lot more modest on its winding paths through the administration than the high-flying declarations led us to expect.

32 Interview With Aleksey Venediktov of Ekho Moskvyy Radio, 20.4.2005, in: www.state.gov (6.6.2007).

33 Remarks to the Press en Route Ankara, 6.2.2005, in: www.state.gov (6.6.2007). Similar to Engaging also in the Interview on CNN With John King, 9.5.2005, in: www.state.gov (6.6.2007): “But we also recognize that a Russia that is isolated is not very likely to make progress on democracy, and while it may not always be with the speed that we would like to see, we have a much better chance of seeing a democratic Russia if it is integrated into international institutions that are themselves democratic.”

34 President Discusses American and European Alliance in Belgium, Concert Noble, 21.2.2005, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

35 But he also addressed plain speaking to his Latvian hosts and their nationalities policy. President Discusses Freedom and Democracy in Latvia, 7.5.2005, in: www.whitehouse.gov. In even more detail on these principles in his speech to the International Republican Institute, 18.5.2005, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

4. Transformational Diplomacy: Democracy promotion in practice

The “ultimate goal” of American foreign policy proclaimed by George W. Bush in his second inaugural speech, of ending “tyranny in our world”, while giving this a handy label and just as handy a mission, also provided his critics in Washington with a no less handy tool with which they could challenge his policy on Russia. This was encouraged by the fact that in attempting to pursue a dual strategy by finding a balance between transformational confrontation and foreign policy cooperation, in practice business continued as usual and in addition the rank and file of the administration let a lot of steam out of Bush’s revolutionary vision. This was apparent on the one hand in the concept of a “transformational diplomacy”, with which Condoleezza Rice sought to rebuild both the world order and her ministry, as well as on the other hand in the material resources earmarked for this purpose.

“Transformational diplomacy” claimed to view foreign policy no longer as managing relations between states, but as helping to bring about changes within states through promoting democracy, with the goal of a “balance of power that favors freedom” (Rice 2006). This would be, Rice proclaimed, the only “realist statesmanship for a changed world” (Rice 2005), but in practice came down to being barely more than the American contribution to activities also conducted elsewhere, through attempts by a *joined-up government* to overcome dysfunctional departmental boundaries between foreign, defence and development policy. In this matter Russia was not in their sights, either as the subject or the object of the freedom agenda. More still: in one of the important practical measures, the “Global Repositioning of Foreign Service Personnel”, Russia with thirteen diplomats ought to record one of the highest losses of American personnel in the world, which instead was transferred to countries such as China (+24) and India (+17).³⁶ This might also be due to the fact that the “transformational diplomacy” at the beginning of 2006 came at a time when the euphoria over the coloured revolutions was already starting to die away, so that the Russian domino once again dropped out of sight.³⁷

Against the backdrop of a global freedom agenda in Washington the coloured revolutions had not only met with widespread approval but had also set expectations and a degree of revolutionary solidarity in motion. As the Foreign Minister commented during her visit to Moscow in April 2005, unlike socialist revolutions democracy was certainly not being exported, because all that was needed was to give people the opportunity to express their opinion freely and “they will choose democracy”, as, she might have added, choose the West.³⁸ However she left no doubt that the USA inspired by the “really very encouraging” changes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kirghizia would also guarantee future

36 Cf. Nakamura/Epstein 2007. The largest embassy in the world remains nonetheless – entirely unplanned – that in Iraq.

37 With this domino in view Michael McFaul prior to the orange revolution had already described active involvement “in fostering a democratic transition of presidential power in Ukraine this fall” as the “most important step for promoting democracy in Russia in the long run” (McFaul 2004: 313).

38 Interview With Aleksey Venediktov of Ekho Moskvyy Radio, 20.4.2005, in: www.state.gov (6.6.2007).

support, targeted principally at civil society and NGOs for the sake of (electoral) revolutions.³⁹

Nonetheless, there were also counterweights in the administration, who sought to curtail overly optimistic expectations. One of these was Thomas E. Graham, until February 2007 in charge of Russia on the National Security Council and in recent years also Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russian Affairs. On the subject of the electoral revolutions he emphasized that it was a question of “steady progress, not instant perfection” and that national traditions would have to be followed despite universal democratic principles. He also confirmed that American support for the democracy movement in the CIS, contrary to the associated expectations of foreign policy, should in no way interfere with Russia’s relations with these countries, and that the US had a serious credibility problem in Russian society because of the 1990s (Graham 2005). These cautionary remarks, however, did not question Graham’s adherence to democracy promotion in principle – after he had rejected this in harmony with Bush’s initial realist position in 2000, arguing that American influence had “always been marginal” and ultimately the Russians themselves had to decide on the shape of their country: “That has been the great lesson of the 1990’s which should have been obvious at the very beginning” (Graham 2000: 7).

Yet this lesson found few supporters in 2005 in Washington’s political class. Instead, colourful revolution scripts were eagerly drawn up for Russia too, by means of a “meaningful engagement of all elements of Russian society”, as Michael McFaul outlined the necessary American strategy (McFaul 2005b: 312). Since Putin’s power base, according to his former colleague at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Anders Aslund, had dwindled to a “meagre group of KGB officials from St Petersburg”, the question merely remained as to whether he would be toppled by these “KGB cronies” or a “popular uprising”. For the US there could therefore be only one directive: “As people in the region rise against their dictators, the United States must stand firmly on the side of democracy against Putin. Even if Russia’s intent is malign, there is little reason to fear Russian neo-imperialism, considering how inept Russian foreign and military policies have become” (Aslund 2005: 6f).

In 2006 the coloured optimism was already a thing of the past. This was due on the one hand to highly ambivalent experiences with the new political leaderships. Thus Georgian president Saakashvili was testing American solidarity with endless new excursions into the tender areas of Russian sensibilities, while the Kirghizian President Bakiyev had targeted the US willingness to pay and, barely in office, had demanded a drastic increase in fees for the airbase in Manas.⁴⁰ In the Ukraine, for its part, after only a few months there was no more sign of “steady progress”, but instead the orange camp was splintering and in the process revealing the shaky foundation of a turn by the Ukraine to the West. On the other hand, however, the Russian leadership started organizing defence in agree-

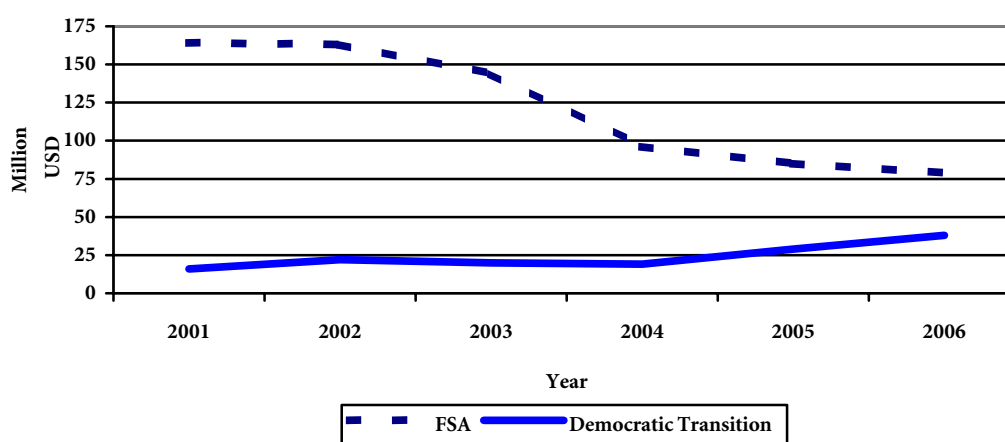
39 Interview With Jill Dougherty of CNN, 20.4.2005, in: www.state.gov (6.6.2007).

40 While under Akayev the yearly lease for the base came to \$ 2 million (plus \$ 7,000 per take-off), Bakiyev demanded on 10.7.2005 an annual fee of \$ 200 million, of which he was able to obtain \$ 20 million (as well as an aid package to the order of a further \$ 130 million).

ment with other potentially affected parties, so that the “most difficult period since the beginning of the third wave in the mid 1970s” was being ushered in for the promotion of democracy, as Carl Gershman, President of National Endowment for Democracy, complained.⁴¹ Since then the Washington scene has been determined by the “backlash” and no longer by the “advance of democracy” (Carothers 2006; Gershman/Allen 2006). And to the same extent, as the “Russia-is-next” syndrome evaporated, official willingness to come to agreement with Putin’s Russia increased once more.⁴² However, this time Russia did not follow.

In practice, the promotion of democracy in Russia had beaten down Bush’s freedom agenda to a much smaller degree than the rhetorical design would lead one to expect – at least with regard to the volumes of resources which were being made available for this purpose and true to the motto that “policy” is not “what the president says in speeches. Policy is what emerges from interagency meetings”.⁴³ This is documented by the USAID allocations within the framework of the “Freedom Support Act”, which admittedly cover only about half of the aid budget spread around different ministries, but reveal representative trends. At first glance the figures illustrate that the expenditure for the promotion of democracy (Citizens’ Participation, Local Government, Rule of Law) has risen since Bush had announced his freedom agenda – both in absolute terms and even more strongly in relative terms, as in the course of Russia’s “graduation” other transfers had been pushed back (cf. Figure 1 and Table 1).

Figure 1: USAID for Russia



Source: www.USAID.gov, author’s own representation based on approvals by Congress.

41 Inaugural Meeting of Members of the Advisory Committee on Democracy Promotion with Secretary Condoleezza Rice, 6.11.2006, in: www.russiaprofile.org (28.11.2006).

42 According to the co-editor of the Washington Post, Jim Hoagland, in an interview with RIA Novosti, 15.9.2006, in: <http://en.rian.ru> (28.11.2006).

43 Cit. from Baker 2007.

Table 1: USAID for Russia, “Program Highlights” (in million USD)

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Economic Restructuring*	request	72.300	24.227	28.850	23.165	11.590	12.121	3.100	3.708	–
	actual	23.082	26.266	24.640	22.565	16.386	7.070	8.535		
Democratic Transition**	request	16.450	15.033	17.370	20.561	15.825	19.480	17.400	28.184	26.200
	actual	14.533	16.101	21.903	20.205	19.035	29.215	38.000		
Social Stabilisation***	request	7.750	12.000	16.300	15.000	14.500	20.113	14.480	14.811	17.300
	actual	12.345	14.879	13.615	15.100	16.720	21.250	19.970		
Cross-Cutting	request	198.500	110.590	35.480	34.844	14.500	20.586	6.820	3.365	o.A.
	actual	34.040	39.176	34.991	34.329	25.709	11.884	4.537		
Transfers	request	–	–	69.000	54.430	12.200	10.200	9.200	7.932	o.A.
Transfers	actual	106.014	67.055	67.300	52.180	18.364	15.716	11.693		
Total	request	295.000	161.850	167.000	148.000	73.000	82.500	48.000	58.000	52.200
Total	actual	190.014	163.477	162.449	144.379	96.124	85.135	79.200		

Source: www.USAID.gov

* Economic Restructuring = Fiscal Reform, Privatization, Private Enterprise, Financial Reform, Energy, Environmental Management.

** Democratic Transition = Citizens’ Participation, Local Government, Rule of Law.

*** Social Stabilisation = Social Benefits, Environmental Health, Human Suffering.

At the same time the data also illustrate that these increases are primarily due to the intervention of Congress, whose approvals for the promotion of democracy and in the years since 2005 have turned out substantially higher than the requests by the administration, which have hardly altered and according to widespread complaints amounted to less than sponsorship of democracy in Liberia and Kosovo.⁴⁴ This was unusual insofar as the Republican parliamentary majority had a highly sceptical attitude on principle towards the approval of this kind of soft money. It was also this majority which had directed the general attack on Clinton’s democratizing policy on Russia and its “‘Bolshevist’ approach in the carrying out of ‘reforms’” in a major report by the House of Representatives in 2000 entitled “Russia’s Road to Corruption”. This had allegedly contributed towards the fact that in 2000 Russia was “more corrupt, more lawless, less democratic, poorer and more unstable” than at the beginning of Clinton’s term in office; it was also said to have brought about the fact that US-Russian relations were “ruined” and Russian foreign policy had reverted to the Cold War (United States House of Representatives 2000: 5, 11). At the time this provided the welcome and probably orchestrated accompaniment to the

44 Cf. on such complaints inter alia Testimony of Prof. Michael McFaul: “Russia: Rebuilding the Iron Curtain”, House Committee on Foreign Relations, 17.5.2007: 13.

presidential election campaign of the Republican candidate Bush. Even today regardless of party affiliations Congress ranks at the head of American criticism of Russia, functioning more as a means of correcting the administration however, and now directing its attention to the unrelenting implementation of what the report at that time conjured up: "As the world's leading free enterprise democracy, the United States offers the quintessential model for Russia's future, if Russia chooses freedom" (United States House of Representatives 2000: 5).

As little as Russia fitted this model, the criticism calling for steadfastly remaining true to principles is vociferous and fundamental. In this matter, two long-standing *Russia Bashers* in particular come to the fore: the Democrat chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Representatives until his recent death, Tom Lantos, and John McCain, Republican Senator and presidential candidate. While for Lantos "Russia's tactics under the KGB colonel now in charge of the Kremlin" reminded him of "many dark moments in Russian history",⁴⁵ McCain counts Russia as an autocracy in the style of the 19th century alongside modern terrorist networks among the manifest threats to American security.⁴⁶

Together with another Democrat Senator, Joseph Lieberman, McCain was the initiator of a resolution which as early as November 2003 was seeking to tie Russia's involvement in the G8 to the preservation of democratic standards⁴⁷ – an initiative which they pursued in subsequent years with increasing vigour, as the "creeping coup in Russia against the forces of democracy and market capitalism" had no longer been "creeping" but "galloping".⁴⁸ And together they had with the "ADVANCE Democracy Act" in March 2005 made the attempt in both houses to elevate the freedom agenda announced by Bush two months previously to a compulsory guideline for American foreign policy in the face of vested interests and latent reservations in the lower echelons of the administration – among other

45 Statement of Chairman Lantos at Hearing: "Russia: Rebuilding the Iron Curtain", 17.5.2007, in: <http://internationalrelations.house.gov> (6.6.2007). Along with Sestanovich and McFaul, again those experts were invited to the hearing who would ensure the appropriate atmosphere.

46 As he commented in his speech to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in May 2007, in: www.johnmccain.com, in which he primarily spoke in favour of the creation of a "League of Democracies" as the future "core of a peace order based on freedom". Cf. also his speech at the 43rd Munich Security Conference on 10.2.2007, in: www.securityconference.de (15.2.2007).

47 Under the heading "Expressing the sense of Congress that the continued participation of the Russian Federation in the Group of 8 nations should be continued on the Russian Government voluntarily accepting and adhering to the norms and standards of democracy", 21.11.2003, S.CON.RES.85 and identical in the House of Representatives as resolution H.CON.RES.336 by Lantos and Cox. On 18 February 2005 the resolution was once again brought before the Senate by Lieberman and McCain, this time with support from the senators Bayh, Burns, Chambliss, Smith and Durban. On 3.5.2005 the House of Representatives followed, where Cox and Lantos joined forces with the members McCotter, Wolf, Ackerman, Faleomavaega, Bergman, Burton, Ms. Watson, Davis, Cannon.

48 McCain, Lieberman Urge Suspension of Russia G-8 Membership, 18.2.2005, in: Lieberman.senate.gov; 6.6.2007. Also in this sense McCain and Lieberman together with the two members Lantos and Dryer, addressed a written communication to the G8 leaders on 20 June 2006, urging them to adopt a clear stance against Putin as well as to hold a separate G7 summit before the trip to St. Petersburg, cf. www.house.gov (6.6.2007).

things by creating democracy office and an advisory committee in the State Department as well as by making available an additional \$ 250 million for the promotion of democracy.⁴⁹

These were the people who left their mark in Congress on its Russia policy, while the realists practised reticence and others, such as Republican member Ron Paul from Texas, played out a will-o'-the-wisp-type role in political no-man's-land. For this reason it cannot be expected that Congress and its new Democrat majority as with the report in 2000, could accuse the Bush administration of complete failure in its policy on Russia – since its period of office has obviously witnessed the continuing decline of Russian democracy as well as a relapse into the Cold War. However, while this was levelled as an accusation under realist premises at Clinton, nowadays in Washington it is overwhelmingly Putin who is considered to be the guilty party.

5. I haven't given up on Russia: A dual strategy as a response to Putinism

By 2006 the Russian leadership had accumulated an impressive list of sins in the view of the Washington political class. The controversies over the Iraq War had not remained a temporary sense of ill-feeling, as originally assumed, but had in retrospect caused a sustained distancing, which increasingly called into question Russian cooperation in the American-led "Global War on Terrorism". The fact that Moscow ignored the quarantine imposed on Hamas by Washington and Brussels after its election in Palestine, was considered here to be as much a sign as the cautious dealings with new Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his nuclear ambitions. However, the closure of the US air-base in Karshi-Khanabad by the Uzbek leadership was perceived to be a targeted affront. This was preceded by the demand by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with backing from Moscow to establish a schedule for American withdrawal. The background to this was the public criticism by the USA of the violent clashes in Andijan in May 2005, which led to a rapid cooling off in the once quite friendly relations with the regime of Islam Karimov – after all, only in November 2002 had the USA granted this regime financial pledges in excess of \$ 50 million as a means to bolster its continued presence in GUUAM.⁵⁰

Here it became apparent for the first time that rigorous observance of Bush's freedom agenda came at a price in terms of foreign policy. However, it also became apparent that Putin regarded the orchestrated rejection of further coloured revolutions within the CIS

49 Cf. McCain, Lieberman Introduce "Advance Democracy Act", in: <http://lieberman.senate.gov> (16.7.2007). In the House of Representatives Tom Lantos and Frank Wolf introduced the same initiative. For criticism of this cf. Cohen, Dale 2005 and John Feffer, All democracy, all the time, in: <http://dir.salon.com> (15.5.2006), who also refers to the fact that this was bound up with the impression that it would be possible to get rid of all autocracies by 2025.

50 Cf. Saunders. GUUAM includes Georgia, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldavia and at that time still Uzbekistan.

as a means of building new alliances, which, as shown by dealings with the Ukraine in the energy crisis of winter 2005-2006, also included imposing supposed penalties. It also became evident that Putin's etatism was clearly following the screenplay of an authoritarian transformation, which with hindsight had been introduced early on and rigorously implemented – an additional serious item on Moscow's sin list. This paved the way for a broad-based Washington debate, reaching crystallization point over Russia's continuing involvement in the G8 against a backdrop of the St Petersburg summit in July 2006, and putting considerable internal pressure on the Bush administration.

For every political shade this debate centred on the classic diametric opposites of "values" versus "interests", without necessarily following party lines. There was unity over the diagnosis of Russian domestic and foreign policy alike and how they departed from the American models, but not in how these were interpreted and therefore in the consequences. To the exponents of a policy on Russia which was committed to American interests and therefore realist, it is primarily US unilateralism which appears to pose a problem, with the result that the return to cooperating with Moscow appears to them to be the solution regardless of its internal order. For exponents of a value-orientated policy on Russia, primarily in the liberal internationalist camp, it is Russia's authoritarian course in contrast which poses the problem, and the solution, with confrontational under- and overtones, the democratic removal of the Putin regime.

Whereas for Condoleezza Rice at the beginning of the Bush era there was no doubt about the fact that a major power such as Russia must always have different interests from the USA, the protagonists in favour of common values, such as Michael McFaul for instance, draw a line from the theory of democratic peace to political practice, which in its simplicity is not much different from the president's emotive rhetoric:

"A democrat in the Kremlin would have celebrated the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, worked with Europe to weaken the Belarusian dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, and cooperated more closely with the United States in pressuring Tehran to accept a deal on nuclear fuel. And all of these policies would have advanced Russian national interests. It is also hard to imagine someone like Ryzhkov, Boris Nemtsov or Grigory Yavlinsky encouraging Uzbek leader Islam Karimov to close down the American base in Uzbekistan, selling anti-aircraft weapons to Iran, threatening war with Georgia, or rounding up and expelling Georgian immigrants. There should be no question that the West has obvious interests in who rules Russia."⁵¹

The comprehensive report of March 2006 entitled "Russia's Wrong Direction" by the Council on Foreign Relations is borne along in this same spirit of the complacent "shining city upon a hill" – for Anatol Lieven a singularly "arrogant and insulting document" (Lieven 2007). It was elaborated under the joint chairmanship of Democrat presidential candidate John Edwards and Republican Jack Kemp, as well as under editorial direction of Madeleine Albright's former expert on Russia, Stephen Sestanovich.⁵² In analogy with

51 McFaul 2007. The same pundits saw things quite differently in earlier times: "Bush's decision not to make Russian internal reform a precondition for Russia's Western integration or for closer ties with the United States has made Putin's decision to lean Westward much easier." (Goldgeier/McFaul 2002: 324).

52 Russia's Wrong Direction 2006. Also to the point the two chairs Edwards/Kemp 2006.

the Congress Report of 2000 it was obviously intended as an attack by the Democrats, disguised as a bipartisan wake-up call, on the Republican administration's policy on Russia. Thus the title originally planned was: "U.S.-Russia relation's wrong direction",⁵³ and this may also explain the participation of Clinton's "Russia Hand", Strobe Talbott, who only a few months later published as co-author another report asserting the exact opposite.

Although Russia's democratic development as outlined in the CFR Report represents not only a value, but a vital interest for the USA, values are the decisive yardstick. These should therefore be given "far greater weight – both publicly and privately" by the administration, since internal developments would decide on how Russia behaves abroad and so make cooperative pursuit of common interests possible. This is linked in the report with a diagnosis of Russian policy which is as clear as it is one-dimensional, namely that it is drawing ever further away from the "modern democratic mainstream" in view of the "extremely negative" balance of the past five years. To this end, in a confrontational turn-around, it seeks to confine Russia to the boundaries drawn up by the West. Thus the report rejects the "strategic partnership" still being striven for at that time by both governments, because cooperation had become no longer the norm but the exception. In its place there should be a "selective cooperation", which left virtually nothing of Bush's dual strategy. Concrete demands envisage an accelerated integration into the West of post-Soviet states willing to cooperate, more support for organizations which support democratic elections based on the model of the coloured revolutions, and a return to the G7.

The realist protagonists for American interests, such as the Nixon Center, hold the opposing view that the USA and its security needs would be served neither by an "à la carte partnership" such as this nor by a confrontational policy of democratization, but only by cooperation on the basis of adequate consideration of mutual interests:

"And those politicians und pundits arguing for the United States to take a harder line against Moscow must either demonstrate that Russia's help is not all that important in coping with major threats to U.S. security, or otherwise explain how the United States can ignore Russian concerns, publicly poke Moscow in the eye, and still obtain a sufficient accommodation of American priorities."⁵⁴

The pragmatism, which has so far characterized the politics of both parties in their dealings with one another, ought not to be jeopardized by the proclamation of an "inalienable American right to support self-proclaimed democratic allies anywhere".⁵⁵ This is essentially the thrust of the second major report of 2006, entitled "Engaging with Russia", and presented to the Trilateral Commission in the autumn.⁵⁶ It also sees no sufficient basis for

53 In the words of Michael McFaul in a discussion at the Washington Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: How Democratic Is Today's Russia? (Discussion Meeting, Washington D. C., 12.5.2006): 9, in: www.ceip.org (7.11.2006); Vinocur 2006, based on Sestanovich. This was finally reduced to Russia's "wrong direction" which had already been used in the open letter to the heads of state and government after the Beslan attack of 28 September 2004, cf. www.freedomhouse.org (4.6.2007).

54 Gvosdev/Simes (2005: 7). Also similar 2006, where they object to the "unrealistic notion of 'selective cooperation'", of seeking to bring Russia into position against Iran and repressing its influence in the CIS.

55 Simes 2007. Cf. also Dimitri K. Simes, Testimony, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee of International Relations, 9.3.2005.

56 Lyne/Talbott/Watanabe 2006. Also to the point Lyne 2006.

a “strategic partnership” with Russia, as this is linked with shared values and a resulting “level of trust and agreement”, which does not exist. So as to evade the danger of compromising individual values, both parties should therefore concentrate on a “pragmatic engagement”, a close cooperation “in the numerous and significant areas of shared or overlapping interests” (terrorism, counter-proliferation, climate change, drug trafficking, Middle East, energy supply). This might also bring about successively a “convergence of values”. In view of the fact that Russia has always been an “exceptionally contradictory place”, and realizing that foreign influence was limited in its effect, they pleaded the case for continued integration by means of pragmatic cooperation, in the sense of an essential “long-term vision” even for the prospect of a Russian membership of NATO and the EU, so as to keep Russia on the path towards the “family of democratic nations”.

Although his freedom agenda affirmatively pulled the President into the atmosphere of the CFR Report’s “selective cooperation”, his policy in 2006 ultimately followed the guidelines of “pragmatic engagement”. It is true that relations with Russia were subjected to a critical “policy review” at the beginning of the year under the influence of the intensified Washington debate and in view of the forthcoming G8 summit in St Petersburg. This took place inter alia in separate consultations with Dick Cheney in January, Condoleezza Rice in February and also subsequently with George W. Bush with representatives from the Washington expert community.⁵⁷ The reason, to judge from press reports, was that the administration did not know how it should continue to proceed with Russia. It is true that there was hope in a “residual cooperation” with regard to Iran and terrorism, perhaps also in energy supply, but not in anything else. In addition, it was possible – also based on interviews with Anders Aslund – to make out two camps, separated by the relevance of the “democracy issue”, in which as officially responsible exponents Thomas E. Graham of the National Security Council could be categorized in with the cooperative pole, and Daniel Fried, the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, with the critical. Cheney tended towards the critical, Rice attempted to find a middle road between concerns for democracy and pragmatic partnership, and Bush was tacking to and fro.⁵⁸

Certainly Bush was also said to have reached, with “utter disillusionment” and “reluctance”, the conviction that Putin had no intention of democratizing Russia.⁵⁹ However, if this was the case, he kept his frustration perfectly hidden. Officially at any rate Bush cloaked his relation to Russia in March 2006 in the words: “I haven’t given up on Russia. I still think Russia understands that it’s in her interest to be West, to work with the West,

57 Cheney had invited five participants, including McFaul, Sestanovich and Aslund, Rice was accompanied among others by the then leader of the Russia programme at the Carnegie Endowment, Andrew Kuchins, and Bush besides Kuchins also Marshall Goldman from Harvard University. In addition there was a half-hour meeting between Cheney and Duma member Vladimir Ryshkov, whose recommendations did not match the expectations this raised for American innovators for a confrontational turn-around however. Cf. the harsh reaction in the Russian press: “Smelaia demokraticeskaja vstrecha Cheini i Ryshkova, Nezavisimaia gazeta”, 6.5.2006, in: ng.ru/printed/67656 (12.5.2006).

58 Cf. U.S. examines Russia policy 2006; Vinocur 2006.

59 Hoagland 2006. In the opinion of McFaul however this message had not yet got through to Bush, who “was still harbouring unfounded hopes” (McFaul/Goldgeier 2006).

and to act in concert with the West.” For this reason he also explicitly opposed calling off the G8 summit, because a “frank discussion” both at the level of a forum and of personal relations was the order of the day.⁶⁰ In this respect the ideas of those experts had obviously not borne fruit in his administration, who in the sense of “selective cooperation” sought to establish symbolic signals, spanning a “comprehensive and blunt speech by a senior official”, the prior holding of a summit in traditional G7 format, and a meeting with Russian opposition or as in May 2005 the visit to a democracy on Russia’s borders.⁶¹

In actual fact the St Petersburg G8 summit unfolded largely in accordance with Russian screenplay, and Putin’s guests avoided giving any offence. Even with regard to the “democracy issue” Bush remained noticeably reticent and defensive. In this way, at the joint press conference in the run-up to the summit - in contrast to Putin’s own declaration in Bratislava in 2005, he conceded that he fully understood that there would be a “Russian-style democracy”, and he encouraged, by mentioning the newly won freedom in Iraq by way of example, Putin’s retort that he certainly did not want to introduce this kind of democracy. After this it was easy for Putin to conjure up unopposed the “universal problems” of democracy instead of universal democratic principles in a much more hard-hitting way than in Bratislava.⁶² Since contrary to the expectations originally harboured by both parties for making practical progress in the matter of WTO, there was also no success to record, the project of a bilateral cooperation in civil use of nuclear power did not progress beyond the initial soundings out (the agreement was not signed until 2007 in Kennebunkport), and new differences came to light in the assessment of the Israeli attack on the Lebanon, there was little to see of the “good” relations mentioned by Bush.

What remained from the discussions in the run-up to the G8 summit was a visit by the Georgian President Saakashvili to the White House, and a legendary speech made by Vice-President Cheney on 4 May 2006 in Vilnius, when he paid a visit to the post-Soviet dissidents grouped together as the new “Community of Democratic Choice” during which he proclaimed a very peculiar understanding of “selective cooperation”:

“Yet in Russia today, opponents of reform are seeking to reverse the gains of the last decade. In many areas of civil society -- from religion and the news media, to advocacy groups and political parties -- the government has unfairly and improperly restricted the rights of her people. Other actions by the Russian government have been counterproductive, and could begin to affect relations with other countries. No legitimate interest is served when oil and

60 President Discusses Democracy in Iraq with Freedom House, 29. 3. 2006, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

61 Cf. i.a.. Weisman 2006. This message was already made public by McFaul shortly before the talks: (1) At the G8 discuss first democracy, then security of energy supply and (2) three “simple” demands in defence of the core of “electoral democracy” in Russia (a) admission of opposition candidates in the forthcoming elections, (b) admission of electoral observers (and their external funding), (c) cooperation with the OSCE. This was supposed to be communicated to Putin privately, while publicly the profession of democracy in Russia should not be put off any longer, and Bush should go instead to a meeting – in Moscow or Helsinki – which could be organized by democracy and human rights support groups (Russia as the Chairman of the G-8, 2005).

62 Press Conference Following Talks with U.S. President George W. Bush, Strelina, 15.7.2006, in: www.kremlin.ru (24.5.2007). This was no lapse, but corresponded word for word with other more carefully prepared speeches of the American president.

gas become tools of intimidation or blackmail, either by supply manipulation or attempts to monopolize transportation. And no one can justify actions that undermine the territorial integrity of a neighbor, or interfere with democratic movements.”⁶³

What is remarkable about Cheney’s speech is less the content of his criticism of Moscow’s internal political conduct – that was nothing new. More informative is the context of his speech, which revealed his interest in obtaining strategic gains in Moscow’s backyard. This was the reason in the – as he himself stated – “carefully crafted speech” behind the sharp dissociation from Moscow’s foreign policy. This was the reason behind his courting of the new “Community of Democratic Choice”, which he anchored in the democratic camp as “the main battle lines for freedom in the modern world”. And this was the reason behind the courting of the Kazakh autocracy, which he during his next visit expressly excluded from any criticism – in the deeply felt “pride” to describe Kazakhstan as a “friend” and “strategic partner” and in amazement “for what has transpired here in Kazakhstan over the last 15 years. Both in terms of economic development, as well as political development.”⁶⁴

This amount of bigotry could neither be blamed on political stupidity, nor could it remain hidden from observers in Moscow and Washington. The former saw in it new evidence of the perfidious manipulation of the promotion of democracy and the geostrategic thrust of Washington’s freedom agenda; the latter saw it as proof of the sabotage of Bush’s democracy crusade within his own administration (Baker 2007). The alliance forged by the Iraq War between the conservative hegemonists and the neo-conservative internationalists, which had come into being temporarily as part of the dream of an American empire, had fallen apart again in the trauma of the post-Iraq War turmoil.

6. Our friendship with them is complex: Damage limitation

The official Russian reaction to Cheney came immediately and turned out to be restrained but, in the light of Putin’s Munich speech the following year, unequivocal. Thus on 10 May Putin lamented in his *poslanie* of 2006 to the Federal Assembly – as yet without any explicit reference to the USA and without wishing to repeat the “mistakes” of the Soviet Union and the Cold War:

“We see, after all, what is going on in the world. The wolf knows who to eat, as the saying goes. It knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone, it seems. How quickly all the pathos of the need to fight for human rights and democracy is laid aside the moment the need to realise one’s own interests comes to the fore. In the name of one’s own interests everything is possible, it turns out, and there are no limits.”⁶⁵

63 Vice President’s Remarks at the 2006 Vilnius Conference, 4.5.2006, in: www.whitehouse.gov (15.5.2006).

64 His words at the joint press conference on the occasion of his visit to Astana, in: www.whitehouse.gov (15.5.2006).

65 Annual Address to the Federal Assembly, 10.5.2006, in: www.kremlin.ru (12.5.2006). And in an interview with the US channel NBC in the run-up to the St Petersburg G8 summit he countered Cheney’s remarks with the casual remark that it had clearly been the same sort of incidence, “like an unlucky shot while

In actual fact, Cheney's speech formed a turning point in US-Russian relations inasmuch as it was followed by a Cold War of words and symbolic gestures, which continued to flare up over the following months and to which there is no end immediately in sight. What began in 2005 as a public skirmish over the "democracy issue", increasingly expanded to become a frontal attack by Russia on the world order of the unipolar moment, to which the Bush administration had seen itself as committed not only since 9/11 – a frontal attack led by Putin himself and from which he did not exclude even his "friend" George W. Bush, unlike the latter.

The real thunderbolt was Putin's speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy on 10 February 2007, in which he went beyond normal diplomatic practice by pointedly condensing what from the Russian point of view, had been repeatedly expressed as reservations about Western and specifically American policy since the Iraq War and increasingly since 2006. In so doing he not only turned against any kind of unilateralism, but also directly against the USA, which "has overstepped its national borders in every way"; he went on to condemn the accompanying "disdain for the basic principles of international law" as well as the "almost uncontained hyper use of force", with which the world was being plunged into an "abyss of permanent conflicts". Resolving international conflicts in this way solely from the point of view of "political expediency" was "extremely dangerous" and stimulated the arms race. It was however obvious, he said in a positive note for Russia, that "the economic potential of the new centres of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence" and in this way would strengthen multipolarity and with it "multilateral diplomacy".⁶⁶

Putin had introduced his speech with the vitriolic remark that he wished to avoid "excessive politeness" and express what he "really" thought about international security problems. Whether he had always thought this way, and consequently the rapprochement to the USA after 9/11 had merely been tactical camouflage, was left open. In any case with this the Thermidor stage-managed for his domestic policy now also reached his foreign policy, and both were set in the same context of justification – the horror, endlessly varied by Putin, of the time of troubles, and of the weakness, of the 1990s. Thus in the run-up to the St Petersburg G8 summit he had lamented:

"And on this background there was a whole system put in place to influence Russian interior and foreign policy. And in the last three, four or five years and based on the changes in the situation of the Russian economy then these means of influencing Russian society began to disappear. And some of our partners very much wanted to keep something in place so that they could continue this influence. Little remains from the previous tools of influence, and it seems to me that they have chosen their line of attack on purpose."⁶⁷

hunting", referring to when Cheney had accidentally shot a lawyer friend of his in the February. Interview with NBC Television Channel (USA), 12.7.2006, in: www.kremlin.ru (14.7.2006).

66 www.securityconference.de (3.3.2007). Russia's growing strength as an "economically powerful player" and the necessity for an "active foreign policy" which derived from this, had already been emphasized by Putin in his speech to Russian ambassadors in June 2006. Speech at the Meeting with the Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the Russian Federation, 27.6.2006, in: www.cdi.org (4.8.2006).

67 Interview with ZDF, in: www.kremlin.ru (14.7.2006).

The course of this “attack”, and how it should be countered, was clarified by Putin on another occasion, in his *poslanie* to the Federal Assembly at the end of April 2007, when he branded the Western policy of democratization as a new form of “colonialism” with the purpose of plundering Russia: “Nowadays ‘civilization’ is being replaced by democratization, but the objective is still the same – unilateral gains and securing individual advantage as well as pursuing individual interests.”⁶⁸

Against this backdrop, “managed democracy” repeatedly lamented by the West won a whole new meaning, not as a tool for authoritarian rule, but as “democracy controlled from outside”.⁶⁹ Since then the Kremlin has applied “sovereign democracy” to it, a concept coined by Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s mastermind of domestic policy, in February 2006. It can be classified seamlessly with the incriminated “backlash” against democracy promotion and marks the internal front of political self-determination. With regard to foreign policy it is a question of participation based on multipolarity, beyond the “vertical hierarchy” with which the USA exercises its “dictatorship” and its “imperialism”, as Putin also lamented in 2007.⁷⁰ Foreign Minister Lavrov has in mind here a “collective leadership”, which while not ruling out individual leadership, envisages it only “between equals”. The main aim would therefore be equality and equal rights: “Any other form of relationship is for us nowadays unacceptable.” This precondition had been met at the time of the Cold War – a “tragic paradox”.⁷¹ Currently the “hypertrophied role” of the USA was fading away, while the true significance of the Russian factor was becoming clearer. Thus the West had forfeited its monopoly on globalization, and a “marketplace for ideas” had sprung up with a competition for values and development models. “Perhaps for the first time in its history” Russia had also begun “to realise its national interests and consequently use its competitive advantages to their full extent”.⁷²

In the spirit of this newly won offensive self-confidence the Russian leadership also presented the USA with a sin list, which turned out to be more comprehensive than the Washington list. It includes the “colonizing” interventions of democracy promotion, against which Moscow is specifically defending itself in the course of the coloured revolutions – for instance through the law on “non-commercial organizations”, under which their activity has been subject to rigorous bureaucratic monitoring since 2006, or through the blockade of the OSCE, which in Putin’s opinion has been transformed into a “cheap

68 www.kremlin.ru (6.6.2007).

69 As he said in his interview with ZDF, in: www.kremlin.ru (15.7.2006).

70 Press Statement and Answers to Journalists’ Questions Following Talks with Greek President Karolos Papoulias, 31.5.2007, in: www.kremlin.ru (8.6.2007).

71 Speech by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Moscow Carnegie Center, 21.6.2007, in: www.carnegie.ru (28.8.2007). The guidelines can be found in greater detail in a document recently published by the Foreign Ministry “Obzor Vneshnei Politiki 2007”.

72 Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S. V. Lavrova na XV Assamblee Soveta po vneshnei i oboronomoi politike, 17.3.2007, in: www.mid.ru (19.3.2007). The “democratization efforts” in the CIS therefore represented in his view merely a “geopolitical game”, because the “main criterion for democratic development” consisted in the West’s opinion in being willing to follow the foreign policy of other powers. Cf. also for the context of these remarks Lukyanov 2007.

tool for the promotion of the foreign political interests” of certain states.⁷³ This included also the unilateral disregard for Russian interests in almost all international security issues. This began with military interventions such as those in Kosovo and Iraq, spanned plans for military deployments, which included both missile defence and the planned stationing of American troops in Bulgaria and Romania, as well as the expansion of NATO into the CIS, finally reaching as far as arms control, where in view of the US departure from the ABM Treaty and the shortcomings of the SORT Agreement strategic stability occupied centre stage.

It is not these complaints which are new, it is their evaluation. Thus in 2003 at Camp David Putin had still emphasized in response to the question about differences over Iraq, similarly to Crawford in 2001 on US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, that beyond practical differences there was agreement over the “essence” of problems, and that in addition the “basic interests” of both countries were “very much more stable”: “And in our policy we want to be led by these strategic interests of both our countries, without any excessive emotions or ambitions”.⁷⁴ Since from now on a new interpretation was given to the once marginal differences over the essence of relations, emotions and ambitions appear to have won the upper hand – emotions, because good behaviour by Russia obviously did not sensitize the USA to Russian interests, and ambitions, because Russia nowadays feels strong(er) based on the oil boom and sees the USA sinking in the quicksand of Iraq.

Since then a verbal Cold War has been the order of the day, the beginning of which the Russian press dated on Cheney’s speech in Vilnius, and the Western on Putin’s speech in Munich. It is true that both sides deny that history is repeating itself, as the ideological antagonism is supposedly missing or – see Lavrov – American willingness to take Russia seriously. However, the Russian leadership is doing little to smooth out the rhetorical bumps. In contrast, the Bush administration reacted to the Moscow wake up call in a perplexed and somewhat confused manner. Thus on her trip to Moscow in May 2007 Foreign Minister Rice expended some energy on the message, to refrain from “overheated rhetoric” in future. In her view, Bush had resisted this out of respect for the partnership, but Putin on the other hand had not, and his comments on 9 May on Red Square had provoked the furrowing of American brows in particular.⁷⁵ Her criticism of the democratic shortcomings also turned out to be restrained, while she countered the complaints in Moscow about US attempts to “put Russia at a disadvantage” with evident understanding.⁷⁶

Yet the administration has hardly taken any action beyond such rhetorical concessions, even though Bush has confessed to limit the damage in the “complex relationship”

73 As he said in his Munich Speech, in: www.securityconference.de (3.3.2007).

74 www.whitehouse.gov (23.7.2007). Is it any wonder, that irrespective of any differences the “basic principles” or relations have nonetheless remained the same: “mutual confidence, openness, predictability and consideration and respect of interests of each other.”

75 At that time he had explained among other things that the threats would not disappear, but their appearance would alter: “These new threats illustrate, just as in the Third Reich, the same low regard for life and the same efforts to subject the world to an exclusive dictatorship”. In response he proposed “joint responsibility and equal partnership”, in: www.kremlin.ru (12.5.2007).

76 Press Roundtable in Moscow, Russia, 15.5.2007, in: www.state.gov (15.7.2007).

and to preserve the “joint basis” for solving common problem. In this “spirit” he wanted to work together with Putin even after Munich.⁷⁷ The dual strategy of articulating “strong differences” in opinion and putting into practice “mutual interests” is not being made any more coherent by the fact that it is being cloaked in friendly relations between the presidents, or in frustrated statements such as “Our friendship with them is complex”.⁷⁸ In any event the USA has so far expended much more public energy on differences in opinion than on profiling shared capacities for resolving problems. This is based on the one hand on the diverging paths of political development, and on the other on the unilateral approach to leadership as practised by the USA, relegating Russia as ever to second place and thereby repeatedly into the much maligned brakeman’s cabin.

In June 2007 Bush addressed divergences in values for the first time with a clarity unusual for him to date. In a speech on the subject of his freedom agenda he confirmed in Prague, on the way to the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, that he did not want to give up his own principles and values, and strongly criticised the fact that in Russia “reforms that were once promised to empower citizens have been derailed, with troubling implications for democratic development”.⁷⁹ As a result of this a reduction in tension could scarcely be hoped for. Conversely, mutual interests in the fields of international cooperation often conjured up so far also remain confused, and the USA displays only little movement. Therefore only two topics regularly come to the administration’s mind, in which interests of both “quite nicely intersect”: terrorism and non-proliferation.⁸⁰ In all other cases, regardless of whether it is the CFE Treaty, missile defence, the OSCE or Russia’s dealings with its neighbours and especially with Georgia’s NATO ambitions, the differences dominate and the necessity remains “to push back” (Kramer 2007). But the Russian party also has problems dispensing its new dual strategy of conflict and cooperation in such a way as to leave the rhetorical walls of its demands on the USA open for alternative offers. Consequently the picture here is also a “complex” one.

The starting point for this is Russia’s accession to the WTO, an avowed objective of Putin’s which he has pursued as a priority. After many years of negotiations it was possible to close the necessary bilateral agreement, one of the last, with the USA by autumn 2006. However this did not remove all American obstacles to accession. Beforehand it was necessary for Russia to “graduate” from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which for more than 30 years had tied normal economic relations to free emigration from the Soviet Un-

77 As he said in his initial reaction to Putin’s speech, Press Conference by the President, 14.2.2007, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

78 As on 5.6.2007 in Prague, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007).

79 The audience, including Garri Kasparov and Nathan Shcharansky, was composed of dissidents and democracy activists, who had met for a conference to discuss “Core Values and Sound Policies” of “freedom promotion”. President Bush Visits Prague, Czech Republic, Discusses Freedom, 5.6.2007, in: www.whitehouse.gov (6.6.2007). This was not enough for Kasparov, however, who complained that with reference to the growing middle class, prosperity and elections in Russia Bush had simply repeated the same old stories, cf. “Kasparov Says Bush Is in Denial” 2007. In fact he returned to it several times and again in his press address in Heiligendamm, in: www.sras.org (16.7.2007).

80 In the words of Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs therefore third man in the State Department, on 21.2.2007, in: www.state.gov (16.7.2007).

ion and therefore contravened WTO rules. The Bush administration has been bringing this issue up since 2001, but Congress has so far shown little inclination to follow its lead. Although by their own admission there is no longer any justification, Congress sought to use this lever – as in 2005 for instance supported by the Republican Policy Committee in the US Senate – so as to exert “some modicum of real political pressure” in the sense of democratic reforms in Moscow.⁸¹ For this reason too, on the fringes of the St Petersburg World Economic Forum in June 2007, the Russian government with American business agreed for the first time upon organized lobbying in Congress for the lifting of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.⁸²

The WTO negotiations dragged on for some time, not least because the American party was attending to the interests of individual sectors with considerable persistence, with copyright piracy, liberalization of the financial services and agricultural exports to the fore. Thus for instance, contrary to official expectations, negotiations broke down directly before the St Petersburg G8 summit 2006, due to the fact that no agreement could be reached on the export of American chicken thighs, which continued to be subject to an import ban imposed by the Russian veterinary authorities. The fact that such individual interests could be enforced essentially derives from the situation that in contrast to Germany there had so far been no influential Russia lobby in the American economy, which knew how to bring influence to bear on political relations. Economic relations were too weak for this. Yet with growth rates in double figures since 2003 they have been recording a noticeable dynamism. US exports in 2006 already amounted to \$ 4.7 billion and imports to as much as \$ 19.7 billion – compared to 2005 together a rise of 27%. In 2002, on the other hand, US exports amounted to \$ 2.4 billion and imports to merely \$ 6.8 billion. Russian investments in the USA in 2006 totalled \$ 3 billion, and vice versa totalled \$ 11 billion. As the figures increase, so also do the voices seeking to bring the “great untold story” of economic relations to people’s attention in the shadow of the darkening political climate.⁸³ In this spirit, for instance, US trade minister Carlos Gutierrez announced during his extended visit to Russia in April 2007 that too much had been achieved “to turn the clock back”, on the contrary: “We are entering a golden era of relations between Russia and the United States. I now speak for our president [...] that our best days as partners, as friends, are yet to come.”⁸⁴ However, there is even less evidence of this in other sectors.

Iran and its nuclear programme continue to offer the best opportunity for cooperation. It is true that economic interests have allowed Russia, through the construction of the reactor in Bushehr to be involved in its civilian components and also give a warm wel-

81 United States Senate, Republican Policy Committee, Conditioning Russia’s Graduation from Jackson-Vanik: A Congressional Message for President Putin, 17.2.2005, in: www.senate.gov/~rpc. Likewise in 2006 Senate member Clay Shaw, at the time Republican chair of the “Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade”, also ruled this out, “unless Russia adopts domestic enforcement laws, dismantles organized crime and commits itself to the rule of law”. In: www.usinfo.state.gov (6.6.2007).

82 Cf. “Putin Seeks New Economic Order”, *The Moscow Times*, 13.6.2007: 1.

83 Congressional Record, 19.4.2007 (Senate): S4746-S4748, in: www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord/index.html (11.5.2007).

84 Cit. in *The Moscow Times*, 5.4.2007: 1.

come to arms contracts from Teheran, but both parties unanimously reject the military components. Repeatedly accused of nuclear proliferation during Bush's first term, the proliferation policy towards Iran is now perceived in Washington as an example of continuing opportunities and the necessity for cooperation, even if a tougher course is regularly demanded by Russia. In actual fact Moscow has so far conducted its dealings in harmony with the USA and the EU Troika and despite all reservations has also helped uphold the UN sanctions regime agreed at the G8 summit in St Petersburg. Furthermore, the Kremlin has presented a rare example of its own initiatives, when in January 2006 it entered into negotiations with the Iranian leadership over IAEA monitored nuclear enrichment in Russia. Neither was successful, with the result that the fragile consensus is continually being put to the test. However, as long as those in Washington avoid regime change and other military solutions, this alliance should be able to continue to exist.

Purely procedural was the consensus on Kosovo, but the objectives remain for the time being diametrically opposed. While Moscow is insisting on inviolability of borders and on Serbian sovereignty, the USA is insisting that Kosovo can "never again" be governed by Belgrade, and consequently the existing *de facto* situation should be codified *de jure*. While Russia is warning against a dangerous precedent with an eye on the "frozen conflicts" in the CIS, the USA is emphasizing the "special circumstances" of the conflict's beginnings and of the course it has taken.⁸⁵ The Ahtisaari Plan was unable to resolve these differences, however even Moscow avowedly has no alternative to offer beyond the status quo. As a result here too as at the beginning of the Kosovo conflict the framework of the UN was abandoned and a unilateral solution pursued by the majority of the countries of the West. For Russia this is further evidence of American "expediency" beyond international law, but so far it has refrained from making a reciprocal response even though Transnistria and South Ossetia have already held conclusive referenda in recent months with vigorous support from Russia. The officially announced intention, however, to establish regular relations with both break-away entities, only stop short of formal recognition.

Attitudes in the once cooperative matter of arms control are similarly far removed from one another. The "suspension" of the CFE Treaty, after previously announcing a "moratorium" on 14 July 2007, still poses a minor problem. The conditions by which Russia is bound for its re-entry admittedly amount to a complete revision of the treaty, however with its refusal to ratify its adopted version NATO has offered Russia a through ball for this symbolic act of self-assertion. The treaty is not of much military importance, and for Russia the risks are substantially higher in view of the current military balance than they are for NATO. However, after the ABM Treaty this means another building block falling in contractually safeguarded and transparent arms control.

This is even more true of the US plans to install components of its missile defence system in the form of 10 anti-ballistic missiles in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic, which Putin gives as a further reason for his withdrawal from the CFE Treaty. From a purely numerical perspective it is true that Russia with its more than 3,000 nuclear

85 As Condoleezza Rice said in May 2007 in Moscow, in: www.state.gov (15.7.2007).

warheads is hardly likely to be defeated by 10 anti-ballistic missiles from Poland. However, military worst-case-scenario thinking, as illustrated by the American phobia of Iran, possesses almost unlimited capacity to imagine the worst, and from the point of view of security policy the stationing represents a further realignment of the boundaries of American power projection in Europe, which could very well be followed by further steps, as the expansion of NATO clearly documents.

Russia reacted to this in two ways. There was a whole series of threatening gestures, from possible termination of the INF Treaty, to possible stationing of nuclear medium-range missiles in the Kaliningrad area, to suspension of the CFE Treaty. These were complemented by concrete proposals for negotiation, which aroused some surprise not only in the USA but also in the Moscow security community. For example at the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Putin proposed joint use of the Soviet radar leased by Russia in Gabala in Azerbaijan and added another level to this offer at his meeting with Bush on 1 July in Kennebunkport in the form of additional measures: (a) joint modernization of Gabala, (b) inclusion of a radar currently under construction in South Russia, and (c) the establishment of an early warning data exchange centre based in Moscow and another European capital, which had already been agreed in 2002 but had since been forgotten. In Putin's words these proposals unlocked the opportunity to achieve a "qualitatively completely new level of cooperation" between both countries and develop a "strategic partnership". In response there came merely an expression of interest, which differed from Bush's usual delaying tactics only in that he called the proposals a "very constructive and courageous step", which deserved to be discussed in the greater European context of the NATO-Russia Council – with a predictable result.⁸⁶ A test such as this of its unilateral arms policy between the certainty of East European allegiance and the prospect of multipolar compromises might be asking too much of the Bush administration.

Although Putin in an unexpected turn-around after his invective now once again conjured up the "strategic partnership", the decision over its fate has firmly been made in the USA at least. Partnerships with a variety of adjectives have now taken the place of "strategic": "important", "personal", "positive", "cordial", "constructive", "firm", "normal", "balanced", "global" or – most commonly – "complex" and "on very many issues".⁸⁷ What they all have in common is that they express less the prospects for cooperation and more the limits and difficulties of relations with Russia.

7. Take Russia for what it is: Which way forward?

While both presidents have come to the end of their eight-year period in office, their political situation could hardly be more different. While the USA has slipped into a defensive position, Russia for its part has opened up an offensive one. While George W. Bush is

⁸⁶ Said at the joint press conference in Kennebunkport on 2.7.2007, in: www.whitehouse.gov (5.7.2007).

⁸⁷ Cf. e.g. Bush's press address in Heiligendamm, in: www.sras.org (16.7.2007); Condoleezza Rice, Interview With Sergey Buntman of Ekho Moskv, 15.5.2007, in: www.state.gov (15.7.2007).

faced with the wreckage of his unilateral hegemonic policy dashed on the Iraq War, Putin has joined together Russia's wreckage to create a new international self-confidence. And while Bush's term in office as an episode of imperfect vision is prompting his successors to make revisions, Putin is leaving behind a restorative mission which not only binds his successor to his regime as a clone, but also reflects the broad consensus in Moscow's political class and beyond.

This has left profound traces in the relations between Washington and Moscow, which are now further removed from one another in mutual mistrust than ever since the end of the Soviet Union. This mistrust is fed by fundamental differences in perception, at the centre of which are the Russian departure from the democratic path of American virtue on the one hand, and on the other by American incapacity to cope with Russia's regained self-confidence. According to the widespread interpretation of democratic peace in Washington there is a narrow nexus between Putin's authoritarian course at home and his apparently confrontational policy abroad. For Moscow in turn this putting up of a front against Putinism merely underlines the fact that in contrast to official rhetoric the USA has no interest in a strong Russian partner, but only in a weak vassal.

The key to these different accounts is the fundamentally divergent perception of the 1990s. While for Russia the period after the, in Putin's words, "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the past century came close to teetering on the brink of an abyss, it embodied in US perceptions a departure for new shores. And while from Moscow's point of view Putin was instrumental in setting in motion Russia's renewed ascent and emancipation from Western colonialization efforts, for Washington this was the beginning of the decline of democracy and restoration of Soviet ambitions to be a world power. This fanned out into further narrative dissonances, in which the end of the Cold War – American victory versus Russian offer of cooperation – and "double standards" in implementing George W. Bush's freedom agenda occupied the most prominently publicized positions.⁸⁸

These differences in mutual perception are so fundamental that cosmetic adjustments are of no use. Instead the coordinates of American policy on Russia must be drawn up again from scratch. Neither the wholesome condescension with which Clinton treated Yeltsin's Russia, nor even less the amalgam of ideological crusading and indifference in terms of power politics which Bush cultivated with Putin were able to achieve any "modicum" of effect, by which Moscow should be committed to the Washington agenda. The objective of reliably binding Russia to the West was utterly missed. As it is, it was an objective which largely lost its way in the mists of rhetoric, and in its practical dimension remained restricted to fobbing Russia off as an object of Western ambitions with those crumbs which got dropped during the management of other problems.

As a mere object of American policy, Russia is in fact much more clearly "lost" than at the end of Bill Clinton's term in office, even if there can be as little talk of antagonism today as there was back then. Like then, bilateral relations have now been reduced to a simple friendship between two men. However, while in the case of Clinton consideration of

88 Cf. in this regard "dueling narratives" Legvold (2006: 160).

Yeltsin still lent American policy a cooperative angle, for Bush only damage limitation was left caused by his ignorance in the face of Russian desire to cooperate. The real challenge now consists of Russia being perceived in Washington as a subject – beyond transformational triumphalism, released by the “victory” in the Cold War, and beyond hegemonic unilateralism, which informs the formation of coalitions in the global war against terrorism. On both sides these are faced with both economic and structural obstacles. George Bush is unlikely to initiate such a change in direction, and on the Russian side a sense for the risks of the confrontational determination with which national interests are currently being propagated is still hard to detect.

What is obvious among the structural obstacles is that Russia, measured by the standards of the democratic community, is now far removed from the West, without at the same time having significantly increased its international weight by way of compensation – in spite of the spreading Moscow dreams of a “world without the West”.⁸⁹ The “Russian factor” is booming primarily in the minds of the Moscow political class, who have their heads in the clouds of natural gas, manifesting itself as a still remarkable gulf between pointed demands and practical capacity to help solving international problems. One can only feel comfortable in such a setting if one’s own solutions are not called for due to the unilateral ignorance of other actors. In connection with the proffered inclusion of a possible potential for disruption this justifies the necessity of a policy of “Engaging (with) Russia”. This in turn requires “to calm down and take Russia for what it is: a major outside player that is neither an eternal foe nor an automatic friend”, as Dmitri Trenin put it (Trenin 2006a: 95). And it is only this which makes it possible to test what Russia actually represents beyond the demands for status.

Although Russia’s desire for self-determination is limited to winning international status and so remains fixed on the USA, the expectation that Moscow as in the past will follow Washington’s course as a last resort, or will at least tolerate it, is false. Subjectively it now feels strong enough to be the champion of international order against global American projections of power and regime. This increases the costs of American unilateralism, however it will not decide its fate. Russia is not able to launch an effect such as this in Washington for the time being. On the contrary, Moscow’s image after a short-lived period of illumination in the wake of 9/11 has now once again sunk “somewhere deep in the salt mines” as an American pundit once put it.⁹⁰ The most vociferous (anti-)Russia lobby is that front of liberal critics, in association with Polish, Ukrainian and Baltic interest groups, who have found in Putinism a welcome target for their Russia bashing fed by a variety of motives. In Germany this is kept under control by means of the very robust interests of the trading state at the heart of Europe in stability and open borders to the East of the continent, as well as by means of a less robust discourse of reconciliation. Such safeguards do not exist in Washington, with the result that under public pressure the ten-

89 The title of a recently published article in *The National Interest* on the consequences of global power shifts (Barma/Ratner/Weber: 2007).

90 Cit. from Trenin 2006b.

dency represented in both parties is great, to make relations with Russia secondary to conditions in Russia. This is of no use to any one however.

Currently the task does not only consist of holding those relations by means of residual shared interests together, which are collapsing under the weight of diverging values; more importantly it consists of closing up the growing holes in the core area of the mutual interests concerning foreign and security policy. This makes considerable demands on the coherence of the dual strategy, if both equally legitimate objectives are to be jointly pursued: exert democratic influence on conditions in Russia, and use relations with Russia for joint problem-resolution, beyond the inclination to “push back”. To this end it will be necessary on one hand to de-ideologize democratic peace in the official discourse of the US administration. The fact that American foreign policy does not only serve legitimate national interests, but generates its legitimacy through a universal mission, makes it blind to interests which do not match its own and unreceptive to compromises. And it compromises democracy as a geostrategic plot in which free choice is advocated, but its result taken as the relevant yardstick for measuring democratic maturity. A de-ideologizing of this kind has already begun with the demise of neo-conservatism, but Russia’s image problem has in its case put on the brakes.

On the other hand, it is a matter of “de-contaminating” the promotion of democracy, so as to uncouple it from American geostrategy and its military tools in the form of regime change.⁹¹ This affects on the one hand American concepts of democratization. Democracy, as Sergey Ivanov once claimed, is “not a potato which you can transplant from one garden to another.”⁹² In actual fact potatoes, unlike Voltaire’s coconut palms, can grow almost anywhere and especially in Russia, but with very variable results. Less model-Platonism and more historical sensitivity in the sense of a gradualism based on modernization theory would consequently seem to be called for. On the other hand it affects the strategic embedding of the promotion of democracy which kept on the short leash of the State Department and the US embassies has been feeding the suspicion of primarily being a tool for foreign policy, very much in contrast to the German political foundations.

This does not reduce the distance to Putinism, which remains a challenge for democratic values. The tensions which arise from this are therefore not allayed. As long as in the American and Western public bashing Russia promises to make a greater impression than engaging Russia, these tensions will continue to run high. At the end of the day this can only be countered by an articulate constituency, in the short term however also by clearly communicated objectives for cooperation. Willingness to cooperate would be generated – especially under the present conditions of a basic disposition which is confrontational – most likely from the *tertium* of shared challenges which have an equal impact. The list of these challenges is well known and long, an interpretation of it which is unanimous however requires communication and furthermore the capacity to deal productively with dissent. There would therefore be some use in American policy once again reflecting on the

91 This concept was first used by Thomas Carothers in 2007.

92 Cit from www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9060-8.cfm (9.5.2006).

certainties from the beginning of Bush's term in office, that major powers can have different interests regardless of their internal constitution. And it would be of even more use if it were to recognise that global partnerships and procedures established in line with international law are essential even for the "indispensable nation". This realization obviously still has to reach maturity, especially as it requires not only bidding farewell to Bush's unilateral legacy, but also something akin to a cultural transformation taking place in the USA. It will not exactly be made any easier by the situation that a change in the worrying trend, unlike a few years ago, no longer depends upon the USA alone but also on Russia.

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